University of Alberta

Being Invisible in a Place that is Visible: Exploring Performative Circumstances Within the Objective Drama Project: The Impact of the Intercultural Process Upon the Aesthetic Consciousness of Polish Director, Jerzy Grotowski and Balinese Collaborator, Performer and Scholar, I Wayan Lendra.

by

Bali Panesar ©

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This thesis is dedicated to I Wayan Lendra and his master Jerzy Grotowski, my master John de Ruiter, my two mentors: Beau Coleman, who inspired me to study Balinese theatre, Kathleen Weiss, who inspired me to pursue my passion for the work of Grotowski, my beloved Nadien Chu, who listened and cared, and my family who have offered their great love and support.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the performative circumstances within the Objective Drama Project and the impact of the intercultural process upon the aesthetic consciousness of Polish director, Jerzy Grotowski and Balinese collaborator, performer and scholar, I Wayan Lendra. In July 2005 I traveled to the island of Bali, to experience Balinese theatrical rituals first-hand and to interview I Wayan Lendra who had collaborated with Grotowski during the first three years of the Objective Drama Project. In Bali, I was fortunate to attend Barong, LeGong, and other theatrical performances that I documented [all photos that appear in this thesis (unless otherwise indicated) were taken by myself]. On a number of occasions I interviewed Lendra and attended theatrical performances accompanied by him. Lendra's thoughts and experiences concerning his work with Grotowski offer a missing link to this important period in the development of intercultural theatre.

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The Quest for the Sacred is a Search

The intercultural research and experimentation of Polish director, Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1999), who saw theatre as a vehicle for self-exploration, continues to serve as a vital contribution to the growth of a new aesthetic consciousness within a field of research and practice broadly known as intercultural theatre. Of the various cultures that have influenced the course of development within this field, the significant contributions of Balinese theatre in which performances are sacred rituals, stands out as a key to understanding intercultural theory and practice. Grotowski's search "to re-evoke a very ancient form of art where ritual and artistic creation (are) seamless" (Osinski 96) distinguished his method from more representational directorial approaches and eventually moved him outside the arena of formal theatre altogether. During the first three years of the Objective Drama Project (1983-1992), Grotowski formed an international collective consisting of four core performers from different parts of the world and trained in vastly different traditions; among these was Balinese performer and scholar, I Wayan Lendra.

During this intensive period of rigorous actor training and intercultural collaboration, not only was Grotowski's artistic vision evolving, but something subtle was taking root in Lendra as well. In order to understand the profound impact of this unique intercultural collaboration, it is important to chart the evolution of the aesthetic consciousness of both Grotowski and Lendra. My intention is to explore and draw connections between Lendra's performance experiences, which were ephemeral, but at the same time, profoundly transformative, and Grotowski's philosophy and training

method as it evolved in significant ways during this time. Like Balinese theatre, Grotowski's methodology was derived from a synthesis of rigorous theatrical training techniques on the one hand, and an exploration of liminal states of consciousness on the other.

The impact of Grotowski's work during the Objective Drama Project is far-reaching. Renowned British director, Peter Brook, describes Grotowski's work as 'Art as a Vehicle' (Brook, *Grotowski* 92-94). The logical question this description raises is: what is the final destination? According to theatre anthropologist Richard Schechner:

> since Grotowski, self-expression has become a main function not only of training but of theatrical performance itself. In some significant ways -- workshops, "paratheatre," the "human potential movement" --procedures that previously were part of training, that were done before, and in preparation for, public performance, have become the performances themselves. Sometimes, as in Grotowski's work since the mid-seventies, public performances have been abandoned. All that remains are techniques of self-expression, group interaction, intercultural exchange. The focus of theatrical activity has shifted from the "finished work" to the "process of working," and this process has become a thing in itself. In this way, theatrical workshops have augmented, or replaced, certain kinds of religious experiences. (Schechner, *Between* 236)

Schechner suggests that Grotowski's work is marked *not* by arriving at a specific destination; it is the process that is paramount. An exploration of this process is a compelling topic, one that highlights the conditions, the performative circumstances that characterized the creative space that defined the Objective Drama Project. In his book *The Empty Space*, director Peter Brook describes such conditions as instrumental factors that can either hinder or facilitate the process of making the invisible visible (Brook, *Empty* 63).

The creative space of the Objective Drama Project was expansive, while at the same time insular. The work that it yielded reflected the diversity of its

reclusive locales in California's countryside, Italy's mountainous regions, and the deserts of Mexico where participants trained for at least eight hours every day for three years. These conditions were meticulously balanced with other conditions; all work was presented before Grotowski alone. These pieces, in turn, had strong ritualistic components which, when coupled with all the other performative circumstances, led to innovative works of art that reflected profound depths and intimacy.

During his early years of experimentation within the Polish Laboratory Theatre, Grotowski's method was still in its formative stages; he was continuously experimenting with adapting and amalgamating traditional eastern performance techniques to a modern performance context. Theories were tested within the context of a troupe of Polish actors. Of this ensemble, Grotowski's work with actor Ryszard Cieslak, who embodied many of Grotowski's principles, serves as a poignant platform from which I explore the nature of Grotowski's Pre-Objective Drama Project work. His work with Cieslak marked a distinct departure from product-oriented to process-oriented practices, away from 'acting' to 'being'. This shift involved working with Cieslak over the course of many years, guiding him to use his body as an instrument that could be refined through rigorous training. Through this training, Cieslak was able to access latent energies within his mind and body which he used to develop his dynamic stage presence, one that not only intrigued and delighted audiences, but had a transformative effect on them as well. Grotowski believed that the invisible power, that is: actors' presence (the degree to which they can energetically affect and impress upon the audience) depends upon their

conscious awareness and conscious use of these energies. Opening up Cieslak's true creative potential was a delicate process: before anything could happen, Grotowski had to gain his complete trust. Once Cieslak was able to give himself to the method, he began to tap into the source of his own innate power, which in turn intensified his stage presence. However, at times the process was excruciatingly painful, as it involved stripping away layers of old patterned behavior before a new way of being could surface.

Grotowski's research within the Polish Laboratory Theatre (Teatr-Laboratorium) derived from the premise that it is motions (the physical actions), not emotions, that hold the key to powerful, transformative performances. It may seem paradoxical that rigorous training with codified gestures holds the key to open up and reveal something invisible (the spontaneity that originates from one's being); yet, Grotowski discovered that when performers would mould their bodies according to specific forms and tensions, these images created an energetic spectacle that could be transferred from the actors to the spectators. During this transference, it was common for strong emotions to arise in the performers. Grotowski maintained that actors should resist the urge to indulge themselves in such emotions, for this succeeds only in creating an artificial facade whereby the face itself becomes a type of emotional mask. This type of mask not only impedes the audience's authentic response, but also hinders the expression of the Being. According to Grotowski, an

> actor has two possibilities. Either, one, he plays for the audience – which is completely natural if we think of the theatre's function – which leads him to a kind of flirtation that means that he is playing for himself, for the satisfaction of being accepted, loved, affirmed – and the result is narcissism; or two, he works directly for himself. That means he observes his emotions, looks for the richness of his psychic states – and this is the shortest way to hypocrisy and hysteria. Why hypocrisy? Because all psychic states observed are no longer lived, because emotion observed is no longer emotion. And there is always the pressure to pump up great emotions within oneself. But emotions do not

> depend upon our wills. We begin to imitate emotions within ourselves, and that is pure hypocrisy. Then the actor looks for something concrete in himself and the easiest thing is hysteria. He hides within hysterical reactions – formless improvisations with wild gestures and screams. This, too, is narcissism. But if acting is not for the audience and not for oneself, what is left?.(Hoffman and Schechner 38)

Japanese performer, Yosi Oida, who worked extensively with Peter Brook during his intercultural production of the Hindu epic, *Mahabharata*, offers an alternative approach to acting which echoes Grotowski's philosophy. In his book *The Invisible Actor*, Oida explains that

> acting is not about showing (one's) presence or displaying (one's) technique. Rather it is about revealing, through acting, 'something else', something that the audience doesn't encounter in daily life. The actor doesn't demonstrate it. It is not physically visible, but, through the engagement of the onlooker's imagination, 'something else' will appear in his or her mind. For this to happen, the audience must not have the slightest awareness of what the actor is doing. They must be able to forget the actor. The actor must disappear. (Oida xvii)

In order to make the invisible visible, Grotowski's method stressed the importance of creating and following a score with honesty and precision. A score can be defined as a series of precise *actions* that have been consciously composed to engage the mind and body in an active way. In order to maintain the intensity of focus and concentration that following a score demands, one must be completely in the present moment. Being in the present moment produces a strong energetic presence, but this presence cannot be achieved until and unless performers have emptied themselves of everything that would prevent them from *being* in the present moment.

In his article "The Mask -- Coming Out Of Our Shell" (Brook, *Shifting* 217-220) Brook uses the theatrical convention of masks as a metaphor for the continual process of veiling and unveiling reality that occurs within life and the arts. This metaphor is particularly useful in understanding the fundamentals of Grotowski's work as well as

Lendra's training as a Balinese artist. Masks, explains Brook, possess the power to reveal and conceal reality, masking it, if you will, with something that is not real, something that is a lie, though not simply a lie, but, rather a cunning deception that "acts" as though it were the truth. Though it is true that masks that reveal and those that conceal are indeed both masks, they "are as different as health and disease" (Brook, *Shifting* 217). Brook's article begins with a painfully honest inquiry into the dishonesty of consciousness that distorts itself into a lie, and then in-turn distorts itself to mimic the appearance of the truth. Later he uses this metaphor to launch a poignant criticism of representational theatre in which a scene designer

> draws out of his own subconscious one of his own million lying or distorted or sentimental masks and then pops it onto another person. So (that)… one is lying through the external image of someone else's lie…lying through another person's fantasy life. (Brook, *Shifting* 217-218)

Grotowski's work, which involved unmasking actors to reveal their authentic selves through an exploration of liminal states of consciousness, can be further elucidated by exploring German philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer's concept of willing and unwilling. Schopenhauer defines will as a "metaphysical, yet natural substratum upon which we impose our neat and orderly story of common sense objects and events" (Young 6). According to Schopenhauer the term "will" (Wille) includes "not only willing and deciding in the narrowest sense" (Schopenhauer 2: 202), but also

> All desiring, striving, wishing, demanding, longing, hoping, loving, rejoicing, jubilation, no less than not willing or resisting, all abhorring, fleeing, fearing, being angry, hating, mourning, suffering pains -- in short all emotions and passions. (Schopenhauer 2: 202)

In a willful state of consciousness "one identifies oneself as an individual in the world of one's experience, a particular body, (nothing more; merely) an object among objects to which it has many different (spatial, temporal and causal) relations and connections"

(Schopenhauer 1: 176-7). Schopenhauer describes the willful state as a battlefield in which rival egos compete and suppress the expression of the Being. An authentic way of being, maintains Schopenhauer, can only be achieved through a transition, from "affirmation", to "denial" of the will (Young 123). Schopenhauer's belief that hiding behind masks of illusion is counter to humanity's authentic and true nature (Schopenhauer 2: 609) echoes Grotowski's concept of *via negativa*: the process of stripping away an actor's masks, and embracing the 'total act'. According to Grotowski, the essence of the actor's art involves

> discarding half measures, revealing, opening up, emerging from himself as opposed to closing up – (it) is an invitation to the spectator. This act could be compared to an act of the most deeply rooted, genuine love between two human beings -- this is just a comparison since we can only refer to this "emergence from oneself" through analogy. This act, paradoxical and borderline, we call a total act. In (Grotowski's) opinion it epitomizes the actor's deepest calling. (Grotowski 256)

Schopenhauer's concepts echo Brook's belief that the psycho-dramatic technique as commonly practiced in representational theatre, works with 'masks' (those inauthentic, subjective thoughts and feelings) that deceive and distort perceptions and conceal the true essence of the Being. Though it is commonly believed that psycho-dramatic approaches of actor training as practiced in eurocentric representational theatre create powerful, transformative experiences, the techniques themselves affirm the will, and therefore, inhibit actors from realizing their full creative potential. Instead, these techniques encourage a mimetic process that succeeds only in creating simulations of the original expression of the Being. A willful way of being is marked by distorted perceptions; one's universe is confined to one's wants and needs, thoughts and feelings, fears and desires; one relates to the body as a form that is confined to time and space, rather than as an integral aspect of the Being. According to Schopenhauer, ultimate reality is a

"transcendent" one: a position that is also evident in the theatrical manifestos of French actor, playwright and theatre visionary, Antonin Artaud (1896-1948).

Artaud rejected representational theatre's over-reliance on psycho-dramatic techniques of actor training. Artaud saw actors and directors, through their reliance on literary texts, as 'masking' the true expression of the Being, thereby presenting distorted perspectives to the audience. Artaud felt that eurocentric theatre was shackled to lifeless literary texts. Theatre, maintained Artaud, must merge with life. The only way this can happen is if actors abstain from acting and become "mystics once again, at least in a certain sense, by concentrating on the lines, forgetting (them)selves, forgetting the theatre, waiting for and determining the ideas born within us, naked, natural and exaggerated and to see these ideas through to the end" (Artaud 1: 154).

Grotowski was influenced by Artaud's manifestos in which he expressed his precepts of cruelty and pre-expressivity, concepts that were inspired by Balinese theatre. For Artaud, Balinese theatre represented living proof of his theories: that in order for eurocentric theatre to return to life, it had to return to actors' physical actions as manifestations of their physical and energetic presence. The use of codified gestures is a prominent element in Balinese theatre, one that both Artaud and Grotowski found appealing, for, as they discovered, words alone could not say everything. As one of Grotowski's collaborators, Eugenio Barba, aptly expresses in *The Secret Art of the Performer: A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology* "the essence of human relationships is determined by gestures, poses, glances and silences" (Barba and Savarese 154).

According to Lendra, Grotowski's philosophy of actor training parallels that of Carlos Castaneda[1] whose character of Don Juan describes one who is bold enough to go stalking in the forests, as marked by a way of being that is "consistent, persistent, sweet, honest, intelligent, and cruel" (Int. 11 August 2005). This is an apt description of Grotowski's methods of training, which utilized numerous physical techniques from various cultures and traditions to bind the mind and the body. These techniques were the key that would unlock deep psychic impulses and open up liminal states of consciousness akin to Balinese notions of trance. These liminal states of consciousness can be elucidated through applying Schopenhauer's philosophy of transcendence through the negation of the will. The surrender of the self-impulses or the 'will', in a moment of ecstasy, is a pure giving over to a specific other, surrendering to the deep psychic impulses whether they appear in the form of a person, a spirit, a god, or the none-ness/ oneness of Being. Like Schopenhauer, Grotowski was exposed to various Eastern and Western mystical traditions and philosophies at an early age. Through extensive experimentation, Grotowski discovered a new way of adapting these philosophies and practices to a modern theatrical context.

Like Artaud, Grotowski had moved beyond representational theatre, rejecting psycho-dramatic techniques of actor training. His work was highly experimental and involved transforming performers, unmasking the willful consciousness to which Schopenhauer refers. In their own ways, Artaud and Grotowski, envisioned a new type of theatre, with a new language and a renewed purpose. This new theatre would become

[1] Grotowski met Castaneda during his first trip to California. Within four years, Castaneda published three popular, influential books: The Teaching of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge (1968), A Seperate Reality (1971), and Journey to Ixtlan (1972).

the birthing ground for a new aesthetic consciousness, one that would involve casting off the mask of secular culture, and instead, like the Balinese, donning ritualistic masks which would signify a return to the ritualistic origins of theatre. For Artaud, as well as Grotowski, this return to origins involved experimenting with liminal states of consciousness. Grotowski understood that achieving liminal states of consciousness was not an end in itself. All truly innovative works of art needed to be built upon a solid foundation of rigorous technical training. This type of training would tune the body like an instrument, capable of precipitating an energetic transfer, rather than remaining confined to a strictly emotional catharsis.

Brook returns to the metaphor of a mask to express how the performer who is unmoved emotionally is capable of moving the spectator:

> The actor uses on the surface what he has deep inside him, and he allows the flicker of an eyelid to be a sensitive mirror of what is happening inside him. In that way, through training that doesn't go toward using an actor's personality, but on the contrary toward letting his personality make way for his individuality, the use of the face in a sensitive way makes the face less a mask and more a reflector of that individuality. (Brook, *Shifting* 223)

Brook's metaphor of masks as symbols that have the power to reveal or distort our true nature has strong cultural implications when applied to Grotowski's work in the Objective Drama Project. In his book *The Open Door*, Brook returns to masks, though this time not as a metaphor, but as a potent symbol which spurs him to conclude that "a magnificent form is not necessarily the appropriate vehicle to carry a living experience once the historical context changes" (Brook, *Open* 57). Brook's account of an intercultural project involving Balinese masks further illustrates his views of working with traditional forms within intercultural contexts. During a mask workshop with Tapa Sudana, a traditional Balinese performer, members of Brook's intercultural performance

troupe were confounded by the impossibility of replicating the traditional movements and gestures of Balinese dance. Eager to make the intercultural exchange a fruitful experience, Brook asked Sudana if he could impart theatrical knowledge that was within the reach of his performers. To this request Sudana explained that

> (f)or the Balinese, what really matters is the moment when one puts on the mask,"…This was no longer a stylistic indication, but an essential one. "We take the mask, and for a long time we look at it, until we feel the face so strongly that we can begin to breathe with it. It is only at that point that we put it on." From that moment each of us tried to find his own relationship to the mask, through observing and feeling its nature, and it was a surprising experience to see that outside of the coded gestures of Balinese tradition, there were a thousand forms and a thousand new movements that corresponded to the life of the mask. (Brook, *Open* 58)

Because this approach was no longer confined by the codes that were frozen by tradition, there was now space for new forms to arise "spontaneously and naturally like a phoenix from the ashes" (Brook, *Open* 59). At times Brook speaks candidly about traditions as restrictive to an authentic expression of Being. Brook:

> I don't think there is any point in reproducing the sacred rituals of the past which are not very likely to bring us towards the invisible. The only thing which may help us is an awareness of the present. If the present moment is welcomed in a particularly intense manner, and if conditions are favorable for a sphota, the elusive spark of life can appear within the right sound, the right gesture, the right look, the right exchange. So, in a thousand very unexpected forms, the invisible may appear. The quest for the sacred is thus a search. (Brook, *Open* 71-72)

Grotowski's search for the sacred has been a journey full of unexpected twists and turns. In 1968, after more than a decade working with the Polish Laboratory Theatre, Grotowski had not only published his philosophy and theories in his highly acclaimed book, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, but he had also proven the success of his method through powerful performances that earned him international recognition and critical acclaim. Yet, in 1968 his search for the sacred shifted once again. At the pinnacle of his career in theatre Grotowski did the unthinkable: he simply stopped. What has been referred to as the director's 'exit' from the world of theatre, took the theatre world by storm. It was as

though a little voice was calling Grotowski from deep within, calling him to embark upon similar work, not "theatrical", but "paratheatrical". According to Lisa Wolford, author of *Grotowski's Objective Drama Research*, the second phase of Grotowski's research,

> "Theatre of Participation" or "Paratheatre," extended from 1968 to 1978. Paratheatre involved an "extermination of the mimetic" (Blau 1990: 255) and of the "mask of representation" (Birringer 1991: 219), an erasure of the division between actor and spectator. The concept of "meeting" was a key element of this phase—a search for "what exists between human beings when they have a certain confidence between each other an when they look for an understanding that goes beyond the understanding of words" (quoted in Kumiega 1987: 154). Grotowski describes this as "the Holiday: human, but almost sacred, connected to a 'disarmament of oneself'—reciprocal and complete" (1993: 7)...Paratheatre abandoned artistic criteria and questions of technique; the conventional structure of dramatic performance was replaced by improvised activities involving spontaneous contact between a tea m of experienced workleaders and a number of outside participants. These activities, largely unstructured and built around simple elements—improvised song, dance, running and play—were sometimes executed in adaptive relation to an outdoor environment...The work of the paratheatrical period bordered on the fields of psychology and cultural anthropology (not to mention the as-yet-undeveloped field of ritual studies), producing a hybridization of disciplines such as is common today...Yet, Grotowski's research in this period was not focused on such developed, codified forms but rather on locating elements so simple that they could be applied by practitioners regardless of cultural conditioning—a way of walking, a position of the body. (Wolford 7-8)

During the third phase of his research, The Objective Drama Project (1983—1992), Grotowski worked to integrate the rigor that he emphasized during the early years with the Polish Laboratory with the spontaneity that he emphasized during his paratheatrical phase. Indeed the "holiday" was over as he returned to his emphasis on traditional performance techniques. His intention was to "isolate and study such elements of performative movements, dances, songs, incantations, structures of language, rhythms and uses of space" (Wolford 9), "those elements of the ancient rituals of various world cultures which have a precise and therefore objective impact on participants" (Wolford 9). While performances would be made, they would be done in the name of research, and without an audience, or rather with Grotowski as the only audience. The research would not only explore intercultural ideas, but would do so within the context of

a truly intercultural ensemble (Du Yee Chang from Korea, Jairo Cuesta-Gonzales from Columbia, Wei-Cheng from Taiwan, and I Wayan Lendra from Bali). The ensemble members would not only exchange performance knowledge from their own traditions (Whirling Dervish, Korean Shamanistic dance and songs, Balinese incantation and mantra), but would also explore Haitian voodoo rituals, Hatha Yoga, and Japanese karate as well (Lendra 114). According to Lendra, during the Objective Drama Project, Grotowski was

> looking for the seed, the seed of a culture, that is not only being used in theatre, but being used in life. The bigger scope of life – it doesn't matter what you are doing, but what is most important for us as human beings is to become a *good* human being – I think *that* is the seed that he is looking for...Grotowski is looking for something that is special about this person in relation to his way of being, his physical capability, the way he handles himself ...So Grotowski is looking for seeds; what makes things to be so good, so pure...What he was looking from us as collaborators was the seeds, what kind of things that we do, what kind of behavior that we have...he was looking for something that we could offer to him...so we would share our experience, especially how to do things on stage. But, more than that, after he found some seeds with us, some seeds that would, in my case, represent an ideal of Balinese training...he is looking for certain things, how the human body, how this body as an instrument can become alive. What pushes that thing to happen from the standpoint of making things to become alive. (Int. 11 August 2005)

Though Grotowski worked with ancient philosophies and traditions from around the world, his work was not confined to traditional forms; rather, traditions served as a bridge that could help performers integrate the experimental nature of the work with their traditional training. In this way, they could identify those 'seeds' within their own cultures and then relate them in a practical way to a modern context. Grotowski's intercultural process encouraged artists to look for inspiration everywhere. During the Objective Drama Project, Lendra recalls Grotowski saying

> 'you should become the best thief, the best thief steals only the most precious things in a culture'. (Lendra:) After you steal it you share it with everyone else because this is forgotten. You are stealing something, not a corrupt stealing, you are taking out something from a bigger context -- which you call culture, which is called theatre, which is called an actor. You try to take out the most precious things that come out from that culture which that culture often forgets. What is the most precious things in that? – *this*

> requires intensity, requiring hard work, requiring honesty: honest means that your body should be as sincere as the Being itself. (Int. 11August 2005)

Indeed, one might describe Grotowski as the "best thief", since several critics have deconstructed his method as merely a collection of various techniques stolen from other cultures and traditions. While it is difficult to refute these critiques, Grotowski's true genius is revealed through the unique ways in which he sourced the 'seeds', the kernels of truth, from different traditions and amalgamated them into his own experience and aesthetic consciousness. According to Wolford, Grotowski worked extensively with Hindu *mantras* (mystical chants with specific sounds, and vibrational tones and frequencies) and *yantras* (mystical symbols based on sacred geometry). It was in *mantras* and *yantras* that Grotowski found keys which, when applied in specific ways, could unlock what Hindus refer to as *Kundalini*, what Grotowski often referred to as the 'reptilian brain' (the source of creative energy located at the base of the spinal column), that in turn flows through numerous resonators or energy centers in the body known as *chakras*[2].

A poignant example of Grotowski's eclecticism is his use of the Sri (Holy) Yantra (the hexagram that originated in ancient Tantric Hinduism and was later adopted by Medieval Jewish cabalists in the form of Solomon's Seal). The Sri Yantra (hexagram) represents the union of feminine and masculine principles:

> The downward-pointing triangle is a female symbol corresponding to the yoni; it is called 'shakti.' The upward-pointing triangle is the male, the lingam, and is called 'the fire' (vahni) (Zimmer 147).

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[2] Grotowski was familiar with the writings and work of Victor Turner, though they never met. Turner discusses the "three brain" concept-reptilian, old mammalian, and new mammalian, and their relation to ritual and performance in "Body, Brain, and Culture." Zygon 18, no. 3: 221- 46.

The cabalists used the hexagram in the same way as Tantric sages: to represent male and female deities in perpetual ecstatic sexual union. To cabalists, the union of God and his wife (Shekina) was modeled after the union of the Hindu god, Shiva, and the goddess, Kali-Shakti.

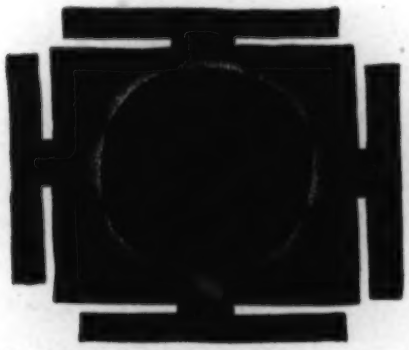

Plate Intro.1

Plate Intro.2

Mahavidya Chinnamasta, fifth transformation of the great goddess Kali, in iconic and yantra forms. The Devi with her two Saktis (female energies) whom she nourishes represent the triad of cosmic phases – creation, preservation, and dissolution – triple and cyclical functions symbolized equally by the triangles and circle of the yantra. Rajashan, c. 18th century. Gouache on paper.
Source: Khanna, Madhu. *Yantra: The Tantric Symbol of Cosmic Unity*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1979. 61.

Shiva is considered the source of all life, the synthesis of all creative powers within nature and the universe; consequently he is often represented as a synthesis of masculine and feminine energies, a divine hermaphrodite, a symbol of completion and perfection. At times Shiva takes the form of Kali, who devours him, and then gives birth to him in the eternal cosmic cyclic of birth, death, and rebirth (Covarrubias 291). Shiva's dance is the movement, the rhythm of these cycles of destruction and creation. Grotowski found inspiration in the Sri Yantra, and at the first Conservatorium of the Polish Laboratory Theatre1960/61 season, he referred to Shiva in describing the essence of the theatre for which he was searching. What I find even more fascinating than Shiva's words, 'I am the pulse, the movement and the rhythm' (Kumiega 115) is the way in which Grotowski tapped into the layers of meaning implicit within this parable, and then applied it to his

own knowledge and experience as a Polish artist raised in a catholic setting. Christ, whose life and death was a continual source of inspiration in the work of the Polish Laboratory Theatre has, like Shiva, been depicted as a hermaphrodite in certain alchemical texts. Grotowski understood both beings as different manifestations of the same truth and thus he described and depicted Christ-like figures as ecstatic dancers (Puzyna, *Grtotowski Sourcebook* 93).

Plate Intro.3
an alchemical depiction of Christ
Source: "Resurrection of the United Eternal Body," colorized woodcut from the Frankfurt first edition of *Rasarium philosophorum* (1550).

Plate Intro.4
Shiva Nataraja – Lord of the Dance, 10th century A.D., bronze from southern India
Source: *Secret Art of the Performer* 53.

Grotowski also found seeds (the deepest aspects of culture) within the way of being of his collaborators such as Balinese performer I Wayan Lendra. According to Lendra, the way in which Grotowski sought and tapped into these seeds was not merely through very specific exercises, but specific instructions to his collaborators; Lendra was directed to return to sources of knowledge and power within Balinese traditions.

> The instructions were, in the end, making us realize, in my case, that I am Balinese, the fact I am a human being. You learn that these are the instructions. You learn how to behave based on those instructions. As it turns out – *that* was our training in Bali. Grotowski never asked me "how do they train in Bali?". He gave us instructions -- what we realized is that we learned those instructions when we were children in our own particular culture. In my case I am Balinese. (Int. 11 August 2005)

Balinese religion, though commonly referred to as Hinduism, is actually a much more modified form of an archaic style of Hinduism, with elements of nature and ancestor worship, Mahayana Buddhism, Indian Shivaism, as well as some demonic practices from Tantra (Mabbett 103). In Bali, Shiva is worshipped in both his creative and destructive manifestations, for the Balinese believe that "you cannot have good without evil. To remove one would be to destroy the other" (104). Balinese do not eliminate

> evil by pretending that it does not exist; (one must) give it…offerings…give it a resting-place, and the chances are it will stay there…The correct execution of rituals will not so much help the gods to victory, since a final result is impossible. (de Zoete and Spies 86)

one can simply strive to achieve a sense of balance. Shiva is also worshipped in the form of the holy mountain *Gunung Agung*. According to Balinese religion, gods descend from *Gunung Agung*, inhabiting their temple shrines when they are invoked through theatrical rituals. When they descend, demons (*kala, boeta*) may also emerge from the lower depths (Belo 1). Everything that happens, happens as a result of movements within *niskala* (the invisible, the unmanifest or supernatural). In Bali, theatrical rituals are not merely expressive activities, but a way of creating links between visible and invisible realms. This process is particularly apparent in rituals that employ the sacred communion of trance. In trance states, actors experience altered states of consciousness whereby they become mediums for the gods to shed insight into an expansive view of the cosmos, space and time. Balinese mythology and theatrical performances are transformational, conveying a dynamic metaphysical treatment of time and place, directing individuals towards oneness with God, nature and humanity (Schechner, *Performative* 165). According to Adrian Vickers,

> Balinese do not believe that nothing ever changes, or that everything is always going around in circles. They mostly think in terms of the quality of the moment, and of past events patterning present events, meaning that something which happened in the past is not over forever and never recoverable. The past causes effects in the present because the distance between the two can be minimized at different times. This is linked to the way time can be benevolent or malevolent, since the past is one of the elements which influences the quality of time. (Vickers 158)

To the Balinese "facts" and sources are of less importance than the patterns and processes of understanding, cleansing and transforming negative energies.

Plate Intro.5
An example of a Balinese calendar (complex calendrical systems identify the quality of divine manifestation during specific cycles; each day, month, year, age is a point at which several of energetic and time cycles may converge).

In Bali, it is the theatrical rituals that are indisputably the most accessible way for people to grasp the complex concepts of time and space that underpin Balinese spirituality. One can also understand the way in which Balinese define power by studying theatrical rituals (each and every stage of training and performance). Balinese do not narrate events in chronological order for the purpose of documenting history. Stories refer to events, occurrences that within a western frame of reference would be labeled as "mythic" or "legendary."

Balinese theatrical performances contain a wealth of rituals that bridge the invisible world to the temporal world so as to achieve a sense of harmony and balance in the cosmos.

Plate Intro.6 ***Plate. Intro.7***

Many traditional Balinese dance forms have derived from puppetry. *Wayang Kulit* or shadow puppetry is a mystical art form, every performance reveals the principle of the unmanifest or invisible (*niskala*) becoming visible or manifest (*sekala*) through the dance of light and shadows. (Left) The screen upon which puppets appear (Right) a *Dalang* or Shadow Puppet Master is an artist/ shaman who is initiated into the secrets of trance at an early age.

The process of striving to achieve a cosmic balance between darkness and light mirrors the process of Balinese actors who strive to establish a balanced relationship between opposing powers inside and outside of their bodies. Like Grotowski's training, the Balinese believe that in order to achieve a state of balance one must simultaneously follow a system of rules while also surrendering one's will in order to enter liminal states of consciousness such as trance. Performances are a type of offering to an invisible audience of ancestors, gods and demons. Like other forms of offering, theatrical performances seek to "cleanse what is unclean, reconcile what seems irreconcilable, compensate, worship and appease, (and) avert danger" (Mabbett107).

Lendra finds a wealth of authentic expression within the practice of traditional art forms. His respect and reverence for traditions does not stem from a blind adherence to dogmas, nor is it exclusively the product of social conditioning. As a child he was deeply affected by the powerful energy that is contained within traditional forms and practices. These forms were vehicles that awakened something finer and deeper within his psyche and within his being. The training within the Objective Drama Project with its synthesis

of rigorous training, and liminal spaces was a vehicle through which Lendra began to return to his source culture at a time when he was feeling culturally and spiritually adrift. As he anchored himself in Balinese rituals and traditions, Lendra gained a renewed understanding and awareness of the profound effect his ancestors had on him as an artist. In Bali, ancestors are an invisible community that forms a link between the earth and the spirit world. One's ancestors as well as one's community takes precedence over the needs of the individual; thus anthropologist Clifford Geertz described Balinese religion as public, social and civic, with an emphasis on ceremonies and rituals rather than on theology (Mabbett103). The Balinese love and respect the wisdom of their ancestors who they believe are the invisible hosts at every meal, guiding and comforting them on their spiritual journey. Balinese express their gratitude and reverence towards their ancestors through daily offerings at ancestral and family shrines. Balinese believe that they can connect with these invisible beings through the practice of rituals, since this is precisely where these precious gems reside.

Actors in both the East and the West have always sensed energy from the audience, from each other and within themselves, and yet this is a vital aspect that is often neglected in many training systems. Grotowski envisioned theatre as a sacred space of communion. He believed that this space would precipitate an inner transformation in both actors and spectators, bringing them back to the reality of their authentic selves. Grotowski was drawn to the presence of the 'sacred', prevalent within eastern performance rituals and looked to traditional eastern forms of performance in order to rekindle elements of authenticity that he perceived eurocentric theatre was lacking. In his

article *Bali and Grotowski: Some Parallels in the Training Process*, Lendra outlines Grotowski's affinity for various traditional rituals and practices which parallel those of Balinese theatre. It is important, however, not to lose sight of the fact that Grotowski did not aspire to create work that was restricted to the rigid replication of traditional forms. Instead, like Brook, Grotowski was fascinated by the seemingly endless ways in which personal artistic expression reflects elements of culture. His connection to the inherent truths and unique beauty (the distinct colors, tones, and fragrances) within these traditional forms and symbols, enabled them to acquiesce with his own authentic expression. I believe that Grotowski would have concurred with Brook's statement that

> the invisible is not obliged to make itself visible. Although the invisible is not compelled to manifest itself, it may at the same time do so anywhere, and at any moment, through anyone, as long as the conditions are right. (Brook, *Open Door* 71)

The one aspect of Grotowski's work that is consistent throughout all phases of his life is his belief that the only condition conducive to an authentic expression of Being is honesty and openness. When artistic practices, whether traditional or modern, are devoid of these attributes, they will most surely lack depth and subsequently will fail to make the invisible visible, and thus true intimacy will remain elusive. In Bali, the correct practice of rituals is often more important than a comprehensive understanding of their inherent meanings. Therefore, traditions are a practical means for everyone to establish and maintain contact with invisible realms. By making a sincere and concerted effort to understand a tradition, one is able to acquire a depth of knowledge. A depth of Being opens up when one actively engages in a process of working with the body, the heart, and the mind so that the form of creative expression does not remain a cerebral, intellectual understanding, but is capable of penetrating one's very core.

Abstract: Chapter One

During his years with the Polish Laboratory Theatre, Grotowski laid the groundwork for what is now commonly referred to as Grotowski's 'method'. In all phases of his career and evolution as an artist, the genius of his work grew out of key collaborative relationships. In many respects, Grotowski's relationship with actor, Ryszard Cieslak defined an ideal concerning the collaborative dynamic between actors and their director. In order to explore how the intercultural process of the Objective Drama Project impacted Grotowski's aesthetic consciousness, it is important to study the creative relationships that defined his earlier work, work that took place at a time and place when his method was still in its formative stages. How did these two men from meager beginnings succeed in elevating the art form of theatre to such heights? How did they succeed in rejuvenating a theatre that was gradually becoming lost in empty and blind representations of old forms? How did they instill their work with such a deep and profound sense of the sacred, a return to mythology and ritual? What was the nature of this penetrating relationship that married Eastern with Western philosophies as well as rigorous theatrical training with liminal states of consciousness?

Director/ Disciple – Master/ Actor: A Blurring of Borders

Plate 1.1
Poster image of *The Constant Prince* [1965]
Design: Waldemar Krygier Source: *Grotowski and His Laboratory* 98

Above is the poster for Grotowski's production of *The Constant Prince*, based on the text by the great seventeenth century Spanish playwright, Calderon de la Barca. Based on Juliusz Slowacki's adaptation entitled *KSIAZE NIELOMNY*, the production, which premiered on 25th of April 1965, was of considerable significance in the Laboratory Theatre's development. In addition to the fact that the premiere took place in the Polish Laboratory Theatre's new home in Wroclaw's Rynek-Ratusz (market place), it was also the first piece of work in which Cieslak played the lead role. Cieslak's development as an actor and Grotowski's formation as a director evolved in significant ways during the extended rehearsal process for *The Constant Prince* and perhaps even more drastically during the Laboratory Theatre's subsequent production of *Apocalypsis Cum Figuris*. It was during this time, the group's highest creative period, when Cieslak, then an obscure actor, grew to epitomize the principal exponent of the Laboratory Theatre's approach to acting. According to Jennifer Kumiega, author of *The Theatre of Grotowski*, in many respects, *The Constant Prince* represented the "summit and

verification of Grotowski's acting method, the synthesis of all that Grotowski had attempted to achieve in his years of research" (Kumiega 76).

In the role of the Prince, Cieslak breathed life into a role that was mystical, and magical, resurrecting the essence of Christ. Cieslak was acclaimed as "the miracle actor of the twentieth century" (Taviani 187) and Grotowski was celebrated as one of the most influential directors in Western Theatre since Constantin Stanislavski. Grotowski's method integrated a spiritual philosophy with rigorous training that worked with everything "in the actor; in his body, in his voice and in his soul" (Kumiega 76). During *The Constant Prince*, both men touched heights; together they were the first to "scale a theatrical Everest" (Kumiega190). *The Constant Prince* was nothing short of extraordinary.

> What the audience saw, what they talked about later and argued over, even the photographs of Cieslak in that production; all helped to transform current thinking about the possibilities of the actor's work. What it did was to change the way in which our culture conceives of the actor. (Kumiega 191)

To truly understand the miracle of the Laboratory Theatre's work, it is vital to study that which gave birth to this work: the unique relationship and creative partnership of Grotowski and Cieslak. In order to express the complexity of the deep intimate connection between Grotowski and Cieslak, I have employed the help of a metaphor. This metaphor begins with a symbol and weaves throughout this discourse like a fine silver thread, connecting that which is above with that which is below.

The poster image for *The Constant Prince* consists of an image of a white male figure mirrored by a black figure of identical proportions, forming a hexagram, a

geometric figure composed of two interlocking triangles. This figure, a symbol commonly known in the Judeo-Christian faiths as Solomon's Seal or the Star of David, is not only a fitting symbol for *The Constant Prince*, but has strong resonance in *Apocalypsis Cum Figuris* as well. It is no mere coincidence that the Laboratory Theatre's poster image bears a striking resemblance to the mystical image of the two Ancients as seen in various cabbalist texts:

Plate 1.2
Out of the great Sea of Eternity rises the head and shoulders of the Ancient and Holy One, the Macroprosophus, the God of Light, the White Jehovah who is depicted as very noble and majestic, with a long white hair and beard. His inverted image is mirrored in the Deep and takes the form of Microprosophus, the God of Reflections: a dark head wearing an ugly scowl.
Source: Eliphas Levi, Dogme et Rituel de Haute Magie

The symbol, like the poster image of *The Constant Prince*, represents the marriage of polar opposites: mercy and vengeance, substance and shadow, spiritual and material, invisible and visible. Cabbalists claimed that evil arose from a split in these two principals, and the purpose of a true sage is to reunite the universal Soul to the universal Spirit.

Grotowski adopted the hexagram of two Ancients to represent the Laboratory Theatre's challenge of stale belief systems and illusory concepts of duality. The holy actor would defy dualities, integrating the visible and invisible through training and performances that would become rituals of transformation. Mystical questions such as these coursed throughout the work, to the very heart of the Laboratory Theatre's creative and spiritual journey, a journey that would start in the theatre and later move off the stage into the wilderness, deep into the deserts, mountains and forests in the form of paratheatrical meetings. Like their work, the relationship between Grotowski and Cieslak was equally unconventional and ran much deeper than that which we typically attribute to a director and actor. It would be a misconception to depict Grotowski as the sole creative force of the Laboratory Theatre; he was but one triangle in the hexagram, a significant tour de force, a shining light and receptacle of knowledge, able to communicate and transfer his light and knowledge to others. But, without the other triangles, actors who were ready to trust and receive from him, nothing substantial could ever have been created. Like the poster image of *The Constant Prince*, the symbol of the two heads of God suggest:

> the masculine attracts the feminine and the feminine attracts the masculine. The positive attracts the negative and the negative attracts the positive. In the morning, light dispels the darkness of night, and in the evening, shadows gather and darkness gains ground again. Does this mean that night is opposed to day, and day to night? Yes and no. Yes, because light is the opposite of darkness; no, because day and night work together to create and sustain life. (Aivanhov 117)

This law of opposites pervades all of nature and holds true in all creative acts as well, including theatre. This philosophy wove its way into the pedagogy and training practices as well as into Grotowski and Cieslak's relationship.

Their relationship has been described as a master/ disciple relationship, one that typifies Asian and Indian performing arts and spirituality, rather than one that we would associate with modern theatrical practice in the West. This is not entirely surprising when one contemplates Grotowski's knowledge of and contact with Asian cultures, philosophies, and art forms. One cannot and should not discount the profound effect these had upon his person and his work throughout his career and life.

> In an article in 1959 referring to his 1956 visit to Central Asia, he recalled a chance meeting with an old man, Abdullah, who demonstrated for him a traditional 'mime of the whole world', drawing an analogy between the world of form and the art of mime. (Grotowski:) 'It seemed to me at that time that I was listening to my own thoughts. Nature – changeable, in movement and yet eternally one – always took shape in my imagination like a dancing mime…concealed beneath the glittering multitude of gestures, colours and caprices of life. (Kumiega 115)

Like the experimental work itself, the relationships that gave birth to *The Constant Prince* and *Apocalypsis Cum Figuris* are marked by a "blurring of borders" (Kumiega 104). While it was true that Grotowski was the director and Cieslak the actor, the dynamics of this relationship was marked by an ebb and flow in which at times the director 'held' the creative space with an energy that can be described as very 'masculine' in its approach, while at other phases this masculine approach gave way to a more receptive or 'feminine' approach. The same holds true for Cieslak, whose artistic and personal journey was one of surrendering to his master, only to become a creative master in his own right.

In his article "In Memory of Ryszard Cieslak", Ferdinando Taviani explains that "(a)nyone wanting to explain precisely what Cieslak was would have to be able to extend the meaning of the word "miracle" and say it without fear of exaggeration" (Taviani 187). Cieslak treated his craft with the same respect, devotion and humility as the

character of the Prince who presents an image of constancy, living his life from an inner place of nakedness and vulnerability. Like the Prince, Cieslak's work depicts total self-sacrifice to the road less traveled, walking that road in the face of a theatre community, church, and society that enforce conformity to mediocrity and 'the norm'. One can say that the Prince's attitude "of non-resistance to the annihilating forces of those who, through fear of his otherness try to make him conform" (Kumiega 84) was also true of Grotowski and Cieslak, whose philosophy and training were unrelenting and uncompromising in the integrity of their vision. It was through their commitment to this vision that Cieslak was able to achieve "something impossible: a psycho-physical peak like ecstasy but at the same time reached and held consciously" (Grotowski as quoted in Hoffman and Schechner 50). All accounts of the *The Constant Prince* focused on the intense physicality, the metaphoric language of the body that not only conveyed the ecstatic spiritual states of the Prince, but also served as a catalyst for a parallel process to arise among the audience.

> Cieslak's movements, facial expressions, tones do not express thoughts or external sensations but only emotional and volitional states of the spirit. They express these states naturally (as though the body were just the organ of the spirit throughout): His expressions of bodily states (e.g. physical pain) paint the feeling of pain. There were no gestures of a body, only gestures by a body: corporeal monologue of spirit itself. An incantation. (Stefan Brecht 125)

In *The Constant Prince*, the King tests the Prince's devotion to the Truth by torturing him. Yet, despite the indescribable pain inflicted upon him, the Prince, "the village idiot cast as Christ" (Kott 137) remains unaffected by the violence he is subjected to, for he does not regard his life as his own. "He towers above the others in his simplicity" (Kumiega 80). In the face of the sadistic manipulations of his persecutors, the Prince passively opposes his humiliation and persecution with purity and love.

Fascinated by his inner strength, the group is driven to monstrous acts of cruelty, which find their culmination in the Prince's castration and finally his tormented death.

Plate 1.3
The Constant Prince: The Constant Prince – Ryszard Cieslak, is tortured for refusing to collaborate with his persecutors: Rena Mirecka – Fenixana, Maja Komorowska –Tarudant, Mieczyslaw Janowski – persecutor, Antoni Jaholkowski – the King, and Stanislaw Scierski – first prisoner.
Photo: Teatr-Laboratorium. Source: *Towards a Poor Theatre* (Grotowski 105).

According to Kumiega, "(t)he Prince's death represented a martyrdom of purity and love to the brutality of unrelenting social order and blind authority, of the individual against the group" (Kumiega 77). Having surrendered himself to the Truth, with the innocence of a child, the Prince mirrors the tarot image of the Fool, standing high on the mountaintop of vibrant green and purple. With his eyes wide open he steps off the precipice, welcoming life and death with a pure heart. In this way he is able to overcome his tormentors and achieve his destiny (Ludlam 140). The Prince possesses a rare wisdom, a wisdom contained within the symbol of the hexagram: that in order for the meanest seed to grow into a beautiful and fragrant flower it must let go, yield to the earth, embracing its own death.

Plate 1.4
Tarot image of the Fool.
Source: *The Tarot.* Richard Cavendish 63.

KING: Is it not a well-known precept,
That a slave in all things must
Be obedient to his master?
Be so now.
THE PRINCE: In all things just,
Heaven, no doubt, commands obedience,
And no slave should fail therein;
But, if it should chance, the master
Should command the slave to sin,
Then there is no obligation
To obey him; he who sins
When commanded, no less sinneth.
KING: Thou must die.
THE PRINCE: Then life begins.
KING: That this blessing may not happen,
Rather dying live! Thou'lt see
I can be cruel.
PRINCE: And I patient (Ludlam 139-140).

Life for the Prince is an opportunity to transcend the flesh and the world, not through its denial, but through the acceptance of the pain inflicted upon it.

> (W)hen he has been spat upon and ridiculed, and disowned by all, Cieslak's face changes; for a moment he becomes beautiful, as if illumined by an inner light. When The Constant Prince is only a tortured body, the same unearthly smile lights up on Cieslak's face (Kott 137).

Plate 1.5
The Constant Prince: Rszyard Cieslak in an ecstatic (trance-like) state. Photo: Teatr-Laboratorium
Source: *Towards a Poor Theatre* (Grotowski 116).

And it is from this ecstatic state that the Prince, like Christ or Shiva, dances away his physical pain and celebrates the joy of his inner knowing. This way of embracing death creates a tender and tragic poem, overwhelming in its piercing beauty.

In his book, *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, actor, Thomas Richards, explains that "(w)hen Grotowski worked with an actor it was as if Grotowski lived through the actor" (Richards 16). Grotowski became renowned for this ability to reach his actors at a very deep level, yet he always acknowledged his actors as collaborators, creative partners without whom his work was impossible. *The Constant Prince* was the result of a unique balance of personalities and energies working together to achieve a common goal. Richards:

> It is very rare that a symbiosis between a so-called director and a so-called actor can go beyond all the limits of the technique, of a philosophy, or of ordinary habits. This arrived to such a depth that often it was difficult to know if there were two human beings working or a double human being. (Richards 16)

This level of intimacy grew out of a tremendous caring, trust, and honesty. As Grotowski expresses in a poignant assertion concerning the responsibility he had to his actors:

> Can I truly grant this actor such acceptance without knowing his whole being, his whole nature, his whole experience of life? What value can that warmth emanating from me have for him, if, in every circumstance, whether important or futile, I give as much of myself to no matter whom? How is an actor able to distinguish between the moments when I am unreservedly fraternal toward him and the moments when I am satisfied with mere fraternal gestures? No, what I must do is to create between him and myself a field of creative communication. This is evident when we mutually go out toward each other, without a word or almost none, and, in any case, without any conventional gesticulation that mimes fraternity. This is evident when I forget I am a director in his presence, and not because I wish to multiply, relative to him, the external manifestations of fraternization, which would merely disguise the lack of deep interest I feel toward him. (Fumaroli 108)

In acknowledging and receiving the "deep interest" that he felt towards his actors, Grotowski accepted responsibility for their growth, growth that encompassed, not only the technical aspects of the craft, but the inner artistry that is born of the Soul and Spirit. Embracing this responsibility meant that he let the separation between himself and his actors pass away. Directing for Grotowski was a self-less act. Though it is true that as a director he benefited from the love and devotion of his actors, he did so by giving of

himself, of his very essence. It was this spirit of self-less generosity that enabled him to embody a quality of warmth and an elevated consciousness for his actors. Grotowski:

> Instead of a hypocritically fraternal director, there is at the other extreme what I would call the director as tamer. By what signs does one recognize him? By these: he neither appeals to the actors nor defies them nor bestows on them a quality of attention which is like a luminous and pure consciousness, a consciousness that identifies itself with presence, a consciousness devoid of all calculation, but at the same time attentive and generous. The director as tamer wishes on the contrary, to extract all the creative elements by force from the actors. He does not respect germination; it is he who always knows in advance what to do. There are actors who love this kind of director. He frees them from the responsibility of creating. (Fumaroli 109)

Grotowski did not take his actors' gifts of love and devotion lightly, and he imparted to them the same precious truths that he had realized through his own work and research. His teaching was passed on via an 'ethic' of honoring the gift, not deflecting any offers, receiving everything that was given, while at the same time not using it for himself. It was his commitment to this ethic that made him trustworthy in the eyes of his performers. Everything that was given was given as a gift to continually move them to a higher level of honesty in their craft.

In paying his respects to Cieslak at a memorial six years after his death, Grotowski spoke of Cieslak's work on *The Constant Prince*:

> when I think of Ryszard Cieslak, I think of a creative actor. It seems to me that he was really the incarnation of an actor who plays as a poet writes, or as Van Gogh was painting. We can't say that he is somebody who played imposed roles, already structured characters, at least from a literary point of view, because, even if he kept the rigor of the written text, he created a quality entirely new. (Richards 16)

This quality of newness arose from an acute sensitivity and delicate vulnerability that Grotowski nurtured in Cieslak. The actors were called to abandon self-centeredness in exchange for a real love and commitment to the craft, the type of commitment that demanded the cutting edge of their honesty and awareness. Grotowski asked his actors to be open to feel everything without the residue of self-orientation, real sensitivity and

vulnerability, devoid of the need to feel at an emotional level. Richards recalls an incident in a workshop conducted by Cieslak in which Cieslak asked if any of the participants could cry like a child.

> A girl lay down on the floor and tried. He said, "No, not like that," and taking her place on the floor, transformed himself into a crying child before our eyes. Only now, after many years, (explains Richards) do I understand the key to Cieslak's success in this transformation. He found the exact *physicality* of the child, its alive physical process which supported his child-like scream. He did not look for the child's emotional state, rather with his body he remembered the child's physical actions. (Richards 13)

Grotowski didn't just ask a lot of his actors; he asked everything of them. It was not merely a standard to live up to; it was the fullness of their innermost calling them. The nature of the work required a level of seriousness, attuning their whole hearts to their calling. Performing in the Laboratory Theatre was not about satisfying personal dreams, or finding professional benefit. It was an honest recognition that there was nothing else so completely real. Grotowski:

> When I take sides against half-heartedness, mediocrity and the easy-come-easy-go attitude which takes everything for granted it is simply because we must create things which are firmly oriented towards either light or darkness. But we must remember that around that which is luminous within us, there exists a shroud of darkness which we can penetrate but not annihilate. (Grotowski 48-49)

When this inner light is free to cost one everything, the darkness does not simply vanish, rather the darkness no longer blinds one and everything opens up creatively. Theatre Laboratory actor Zbigniew Cynkutis talked of Cieslak's performance during a graduate seminar at the University of Kansas 1982:

> Grotowski's decision to do The Constant Prince was influenced by the work on Doctor Faustus. The next step was to find "the total actor," one who is giving of himself totally.[...] Grotowski wanted to discover how such a "total act" can create real feeling here and now. He wanted to break down the conventional separation between the fictional and factual worlds. Grotowski gave up on "tricks"; instead it was to be done by the actor. If the actor is extremely true, intensive during performance, if his body is open like that of a patient during an operation, then it will happen. In The Constant Prince it occurred. The performance by Ryszard Cieslak was unbelievable. He was able to risk everything totally, to give up his own personality to Grotowski. Cieslak became an extension of Grotowski he was recreated by Grotowski. (Findlay 184)

According to Grotowski, the total act is:

> the very crux of the actor's art... that he does whatever he does with his entire being, and not just one mechanical (and therefore rigid) gesture of arm or leg, not any grimace, helped by a logical inflection and a thought. No thought can guide the entire organism of an actor in any living way. It must stimulate him, and that is all it really can do. Without commitment, his organism stops living, his impulses grow superficial. Between a total reaction and a reaction guided by a thought there is the same difference between a tree and a plant. In the final result we are speaking of the impossibility of separating spiritual and physical. The actor should not use his organism to illustrate a "movement of the soul", he should accomplish this movement with his organism…Civilization is sick with schizophrenia, which is a rupture between intelligence and feeling, body and soul. (Grotowski 122-123)

The hexagram is useful when conceptualizing the process of healing the split between one's physical being and soul. "(R)isk(ing) everything totally" (Findlay 184) is something extremely rare; compromising always seems easier, and being completely real without ever compromising seems too huge, too difficult. What Grotowski imparted to his actors was that this shift was easier than existing in the polarization of a split; being torn between two different lifelines. On one hand: the lifeline of letting go, surrendering, and on the other hand: that of holding on to fear. It is the fear of letting go that creates a split, a divided heart; maintaining this division requires massive amounts of effort and energy, energy in the form of fear and inhibitions that work to prevent one from cracking open and coming undone. Grotowski expressed that "the true secret (for Cieslak) was to go out of the fear of the refusal of himself, to go out of that, to enter into a big free space where he could have no fear at all and hide nothing" (Richards 16).

It is the act of self-sacrifice that causes the cracking within, which is actually a breaking through. This in turn opens up the channels of flow, introducing a presence of warmth and light that emanates from one's being. When one's heart is but a little open, then this flow is restricted to the chest; when it is fully open, the whole body and spirit

are on fire. According to his actors, Grotowski's presence emanated a quality of light and warmth that could be felt when he directed. His generosity as a director was itself a selfless act to those who had entrusted themselves to him. Thomas Richards describes Grotowski's presence as

> a very warm weight. This led me to have an incredible sense of pride, a pride I had not before experienced. It was not petty, of vanity, but different, maybe of accomplishment. The weight and warmth behind the words of Grotowski, and not the words themselves, had left in me this strong impression. (Richards 23)

It required intense commitment to give expression to these inner states of being and to focus awareness as Grotowski and his actors studied how this flow would change through contact with others. Grotowski:

> The principle is that the actor, in order to fulfill himself, must not work for himself. Through penetrating his relationship with others – studying the element of contact – the actor will discover what is in him. He must give himself totally. (Hoffman and Schechner 38)

It is this quality of genuine openness, in giving himself totally, coupled with a serious awareness of the elements of contact that enabled Cieslak to relax and to truly receive. It can be said that Grotowski's 'method' (if in fact there is such a thing) is a collection of techniques and ethics all aimed at the elimination of fear and opening channels of creative flow. These ethics rest at the heart of the method and at the heart of the relationships that gave birth to this method. Though the core of these ethics always stood true, there were times when the creative flow changed, and rather than imposing a method or an old structure on a new creative impasse, which in the long run would have proven "creatively inhibiting, since no one method can be universal and cover all possible needs, each actor would require an individual method" (Kumiega 111).

Grotowski's training programs employed his concept of *via negativa*, which as the term suggests, did not involve collecting more 'tricks', but instead involved serious

experimentation with different techniques with the intention of removing resistances, eliminating blockages and professional stereotypes (Kumiega 113). Grotowski expressed the desire "to take away, steal from the actor all that disturbs him. That which is creative will remain within him. It is a liberation" (Kumiega 113). All exercises undertaken were tests directed at personal inhibitions and blocks. To master an exercise, which is like a trap, one must discover "the cause which impedes (the actor)... hampers him, and then create the situation in which this cause can be eliminated and the process liberated" (Kumiega 111). "There was never any concept of exercises as being something important in their own right" (Kumiega 113). According to Kumiega,

> (t)he exercises that formed the basic structure of the Laboratory Theatre training programme, then, were the result of a painstaking process of selection, based on the principle of elimination rather than accumulation, and tailored for and by each individual. (Kumiega 113)

Even in these exercises, these tests, as it were, Grotowski stressed the necessity of evoking "a partner, to live for (the actor and)…take the stimulus from him – all the functions of dialogue. Blocks in this process are clearly visible during the exercises. In the somersaults, the actor who hesitates, who will not take risks, will also hesitate at the culminating moment of his role" (Hoffman and Schechner 44). Grotowski:

> What will unblock the natural and integral possibilities? To act that is to react – not to conduct the process but to refer it to personal experiences and to be conducted. The process must take us. At these moments one must be internally passive but externally active. The formula of resigning oneself "not to do" is a stimulus… if he resigns himself "not to do" … and refers himself to things that are truly personal and externalizes these, he would find a very difficult truth. This internal passivity gives the actor the chance to be taken. If one begins too early to conduct the work, then the process is blocked". (Hoffman and Schechner 40)

Many of Grotowski's exercises involved absolute silence and focus from all participants and were repeated to the point of physical and mental exhaustion. Thomas Richards:

> my mind became tired and quiet: it was less able to tell my body how to interpret the song. Then for some short moments I felt as if my body started to dance by itself. The body led the way to move, the mind became passive. (Richards 23)

During the course of these exercises the mind became still and the actor discovered "that the body also has its *own way of thinking*" (Richards 68). The symbol of the hexagram can help us to visualize this process: if human consciousness is in a state of imbalance between the mind and the body, with most of the energy being blocked or restricted to the mind, then the mind must relax in order to touch into the depths of knowledge, the deep psychic impulses that reside within the body. In order to still an overactive mind one must set it up against the body. According to Grotowski, the intense and rigorous application of techniques opens up the intelligence of the body that is more resilient and will consistently prevail over the intelligence mind. If the mind is equated to the masculine and the body to the feminine, the symbol of the hexagram illustrates the movement of such a shift, affirming that both principals are integral to the creative process. According to Richards, in theatre, "the two poles give a performance its balance and fullness: form on one side, and stream of life on the other, (they are) the two banks of the river that permit the river to flow smoothly" (Richards 21).

Plate 1.6

Plate 1.7

The two banks of the river, the form and the stream of life as illustrated in these photographs of Cielsak in *The Constant Prince*
Source: *Towards a Poor Theatre* (Grotowski 114-115).

Grotowski always stressed that the work on physical actions is the key to the actor's craft and that an actor must be able to repeat the same score with precision many times, while at the same time keeping it fresh and alive each time. The key to this type of consistency is creating a clear and comprehensible line of physical actions, which like a musical score "must be elaborated in detail and completely memorized. The actor should have absorbed this score to such an extent that he has no need at all to think *what to do next*" (Richards 31). Cieslak describes the score as

> a glass inside which a candle is burning. The glass is solid; it is there, you can depend on it. It contains and guides the flame. But it is not the flame. The flame is my inner process each night. The flame is what illuminates the score, what the spectators see through the score. The flame is alive. Just as the flame in the glass moves, flutters, rises, falls, almost goes out, suddenly glows brightly, responds to each breath of wind – so my inner life varies from night to night, from moment to moment....I begin each night without anticipation: this is the hardest thing to learn. I do not prepare myself to feel anything. I do not say, "Last night this scene was extraordinary, I will try to do that again." I want only to be receptive to what will happen. And I am ready to take what happens if I am secure in my score, knowing that even if I feel a minimum, the glass will not break, the objective structure worked out over the months will help me through. But when a night comes that I can glow, shine, live, reveal – I am ready for it by not anticipating it. The score remains the same, but everything is different because I am different. (Taviani 201)

While a score provides a necessary structure that contains and focuses the creative flow, Grotowski discovered that the allure of building his own system, a structure to which he and others could relate, had proven illusory. Grotowski realized that "there exists no ideal system which could be a key to creativity, there exists a challenge, to which each must give his own answer" (Kumiega 111). In the following, Grotowski reiterates the importance of creating one's own method at a meeting with participants of a student theatre festival in Wroclaw 1971:

> If one aims at revealing man, as I see it, in every phase of life this revelation should mean crossing a new barrier. It is in this connection that one must be disloyal to the last crossing of the barrier. In Apocalypsis this problem seems to us particularly clear and

sharp-edged. Already during the preparatory work we realized that potentially there is in it the seed of something different, in a concealed form, a blurring of borders, as it were. (Kumiega 104)

Plate 1.8
Poster image of *Apocalypsis Cum Figuris* Design: Waldemar Krygier
Source: *Grotowski Sourcebook* 87.

For Grotowski, *The Constant Prince* and especially *Apocalypsis Cum Figuris*, involved crossing new barriers. During rehearsals he would suggests the basic themes to feed actors' creativity rather than controlling the process. In turn, actors explored these and other themes, improvising entire scenes that would serve to inspire Grotowski's subsequent choices in terms of what structure to create and which direction to move (Kumiega 74). According to Richards:

> this type of work passes through moments of crisis. You arrive at elements more and more compact. Then, your body must completely absorb all this and recover its organic reactions. You must turn back toward the see of the first proposition and find that which, from the point of view of this primary motivation, requires a new restructuring of the whole. So the work does not develop 'to the side, to the side' but as with the plumb line and always through phases of organicity, of crisis, of organicity, etc. We can say that each phase of spontaneity of life is always followed by a phase of technical absorption. (Richards 45)

Two crucial creative crises occurred in the course of creating *Apocalypsis Cum Figuris*. Grotowski:

> A moment occurred about a year after we started working on it, when it seemed that nothing could be created. What we were doing was The Gospels, which lapsed, naturally, into a repetition of what we already knew. We were playing out illustrations of

> the myths....This was a 'void' beneath the zero point. I think it gave birth to Apocalypsis. This terrible dead hole which had swallowed all our work was the womb in which the work was born. (Kumiega 87)

During the intensive and extended rehearsal period of *Apocalypsis Cum Figuris*, actors began to experience what can be described as an easing into the Deep. While they described the performances as a healing presence, rehearsals were experienced as an opposition to what was familiar; the Deep swallowed up all the safety nets and suddenly all comfort zones had vanished. While they experienced this process as an oppositional force, it is questionable whether it was 'in fact' a force of opposition, or whether it was the shaking of old structures and, familiar ways of working and creating caused by the turbulence of the descent. While the essence of what they knew was the same, they had gone far deeper and could no longer relate through old frames of reference. During *Apocalypsis Cum Figuris,*

> each of Grotowski's actors was able to reach her or his own, personal 'total act'. Certainly each actor when questioned about the production, has talked of the experience in terms beyond those usually applied to theatrical performance. The actor Zygmunt Molik, in interview with me in 1981, has said 'Apocalypsis was never like a performance for me. It was like a time in which I could live a full life....in another world for a while, and this can give you the power to endure everyday life'. Similarly Stanislaw Scierski has said: 'It was all an overwhelming and dramatic experience for me, involving an awareness of that particular community in which closeness can provide unexpected hope and strength – and I could in no way relate to "theatricality", even in its most honest form, or to an "artistic experience"'. (Kumiega 94)

This crisis tore through the Laboratory Theatre like a storm; such a crisis would have laid waste to a strong theatre company or collective, yet it was during such a creative crisis that the strength and honesty of the relationships that formed the foundation of the collective were put to the test.

Apocalypsis Cum Figuris marked a radical departure from literature. According to Grotowski, "it was not a montage of texts. It was something we arrived at during

rehearsals, through flashes of revelation, through improvisations" (Kumiega 90). Ludwik Flaszen, an actor in the Laboratory Theatre:

> The evolution, then, consisted basically of the following. We tried to take away everything that had to do with 'theatre' or the 'putting on of faces' or precise composition etc. The source of this change was not an aesthetic premise or assumption…it was a situation in which it was no longer necessary to establish a wall in relation to others by being an 'artist' behind an objective structure. A factor of direct human communication appeared, and we stopped being against those who were coming to us and those not coming to us. And the Apocalypsis began its evolution. With the new sense of directness, we began to remove all that still seemed artificial and theatrical and formal; all that was ready-made beauty; all that was distant, or remote. (Kumiega 103)

It was also during the rehearsal process of *Apocalypsis Cum Figuris* that Grotowski experienced a shift in consciousness that changed his approach to directing. Initially, he experienced this shift as a professional and personal crisis that had repercussions on his relationship with his actors. Prior to *Apocalypsis Cum Figuris* many of Grotowski's actors described his approach as dictatorial (Kumiega 91); during rehearsals for *Apocalypsis Cum Figuris,* Grotowski discovered another way of working and more importantly, a new way of *being* in the work (Kumiega 74). This shift in attitude changed his very way of being. According to Kumiega

> (t)his change was both a significant development for the company in the preparation of creative work and was an early indication of the radical developments that were to take place over the following few years. (According to Flaszen) The basic method of his activity was no longer the instruction of the actors, but rather expectation (passive receptivity). He sat silently, waiting, hour after hour. This was a very great change, because previously he really was a dictator. At that point there was no more theatre, because theatre to some extent requires dictatorship, manipulation. (Kumiega 91)

It was as though the Deep was beckoning, telling Grotowski that it was time to exercise a higher and finer level of awareness. In order to move forward with clarity he had to call on his deepest wisdom. It was in this period that he understood how to be still in the midst of a storm. Even though he was unable to hold on to anything, not even the stillness, Grotowski was able to *be* still. In order to traverse this tempest he had to relate

to the stillness of the Deep (the feminine principle) rather than coping from his habitual place of strength and authority.

Perhaps it was Grotowski's stillness in the midst of this initial crisis that opened up the Deep. Perhaps it was this place of stillness, a place within the Deep where his creative energy, his light, started to flicker or where it became more concentrated, more intense. Whatever the case may have been, it is clear that this was a period of germination and gestation, the nine months hidden away in the womb, the time of stillness akin to death when seeds crack open and surrender themselves to the earth. The actors of the Laboratory Theatre became like bees working away in darkness. Their toiling was truly a labor of love and *Apocalypsis Cum Figuris* was the fruit of their labor. Many great things have to begin in darkness before they can come out into the light. As the hexagram suggests, light and darkness represent two currents essential to all creative acts in art and nature.

It takes an extraordinary heart to become a director like Grotowski and not use the power the position affords for oneself. Becoming a spiritual teacher is enough to ruin an extraordinary heart. If the tragic story of Dr. Faustus, which the Laboratory Theatre staged in 1963 is any reflection of the truth, then it requires a lot more than an extraordinary heart or mind to teach on consciousness. Grotowski himself acknowledged the dangers of such a venture, for actors and director alike:

> It is not like being creative in an office, seated before a table, but under the eye of the producer who, even in a theatre based on the art of the actor, must make persistent demands on him to a much greater extent than in the normal theatre, urging him to ever increasing efforts that are painful to him.

> This would be unbearable if such a producer did not possess a moral authority, if his postulates were not evident, and if an element of mutual confidence did not exist even beyond the barriers of consciousness. (Grotowski 44)

In the unorthodox creative process that defined the rehearsals of *Apocalypsis Cum Figuris* it is ambiguous who created what. Is it possible to accredit any one person with the signature of this work? According to Taviani,

> Grotowski and Cieslak can be seen as collaborators only by understanding their names as a unit. In reality, there is no such thing as collaboration between parts: there is interaction, a process of becoming, a profound and well-thought-out shape, a channel that is necessary and yet insignificant in its own right. And within that, something that flows. (Taviani 201)

"The outer shape belongs neither to Grotowski nor to Cieslak. The flow is not Cieslak or Grotowski" (Taviani 201) but rather, the creative expression of two hearts and two minds moving as one. The relationship was as professional as it was artistic, and as artistic as it was mystical; it was a relationship formed of a deep bond that was truly intimate. The profoundly personal nature of the Laboratory Theatre's work grew out of the intensely personal relationships that they nurtured. At the core of these relationships was a deep knowing and respect for each other as artists. Listen to Grotowski:

> Now I am going to touch upon a point which was a particularity of Ryszard. It was necessary not to push him and not to frighten him. Like a wild animal, when he lost his fear, his closure we can say, his shame of being seen, he could progress months and months with an opening and a complete liberation, a liberation from all that in life, and even more in the work of the actor, blocks us. This opening was like an extraordinary trust. And when he could work in this way for months and months with the director alone, after he could be in the presence of his colleagues, the other actors, and after even in the presence of the spectators; he had already had entered into a structure which had assured him, through rigor, a security. (Richards 15)

Eugenio Barba who worked with Grotowski at different times throughout his life describes how from such meager beginnings, Cieslak, no more than a novice actor with a " puppet maker's diploma in his pocket, … assessed as physically inadequate to be a good actor" rose to such heights (Taviani 197). In his book *The Paper Canoe*, Barba describes bearing witness to the transformation in Cieslak's presence and persona:

> It was as though that brain which had been a sort of filter that clouded his actions had released itself and impregnated his whole body with phosphorescent cells. He had the strength of a clear-thinking hurricane…Yet it was as though another greater, greener wave were rising out of his body and breaking around him. (Barba 253).

Plate 1.9
Ryszard Cieslak the "clear-thinking hurricane" in *The Constant Prince*.
The score was the glass, containing his flame that burned bright! Photos: Teatr-Laboratorium
Source: Raymonde Tamkine. *Grotowski* 128.

Cieslak became a living testament to Grotowski's teaching, that

> (t)he actor who, in this special process of discipline and self-sacrifice, self-penetration and moulding, is not afraid to go beyond all normally acceptable limits, attains a kind of inner harmony and peace of mind. He literally becomes much sounder in mind and body, and his way of life is more normal than that of an actor in the rich theatre. (Grotowski 45)

One can also say that through this internal transformation Cieslak became a master in his own right. During the seventies, Cieslak would accompany Grotowski on his travels and conduct workshops and seminars in the name of Grotowski and the Laboratory Theatre. His surrender and direct application of Grotowski's teaching to his life changed his very presence. Like Grotowski, Cieslak was able to affect his students with his "powerful warmth" and presence alone (Richards 11). Richards talks about his first meeting with Cieslak:

> I had never felt such a presence from anyone. "My God, this is a dinosaur, people like this don't exist any more. He walks like a tiger." Cieslak sat down and with his presence alone he began to take over and dominate our class. Faced with him I felt like a docile schoolboy, a well-trained circus animal next to a wild panther. Through his presence alone, and almost completely silently, he stripped our acting teacher of his authority. Shortly thereafter he would be demanding our acting teacher to "Tell us what Chekhov is

> to you? What is he to you?" A mini-revolution took place, I was spellbound. Our acting teacher, a very proud man, completely stunned, turned over our class to Cieslak and left the room. We were alone with him. (Richards 10)

As a master, Grotowski was like a flame to Cieslak's glass container, with his luminous energy he could show Cieslak the way, he could be that flame before him and also kindle the same in him, but Grotowski always acknowledged that he could not *be it* or *do it* for him: *that* belonged to Cieslak. It is each person's responsibility to apply the teachings of love and honesty, freedom and discipline into one's own life. This understanding was conveyed through Grotowski's statement of the 'profound betrayal'.

> If I said once that the technique which I follow is that of creating one's own, personal techniques, there is contained here that postulate of a 'profound betrayal'. If a pupil senses his own technique, then he departs from me, from my needs, which I realize in my way, through my process. He will be different, distant....Every other technique or method is sterile. (Kumiega 111)

According to Jan Kott "Cieslak was a young man without experience when he surrendered himself to Grotowski's Method. He became one of the greatest actors in the world...Peter Brook told me that after Stanislavsky, no one knew as much about acting as Cieslak and Grotowski" (Taviani 196). Yet, Grotowski did not fill his actors minds full of illusory hopes, dreams and promises. He had always preached that "(t)he poor theatre does not offer the actor the possibility of overnight success. It defies the bourgeois concept of a standard of living. It proposes the substitution of material wealth by moral wealth as the principal aim in life" (Grotowski 44). Yet, when Cieslak, an inexperienced actor, gave himself to Grotowski, withholding nothing, surrendering his personal dreams, giving everything for a goal that promised nothing for him personally, he must have appeared insane, blindly "following another young man down a road where nothing was certain" (Taviani 197). Yet, like Grotowski, Cieslak *knew* something, that something may very well have been as simple as entrusting his life to Grotowski, whatever it is that

he *knew* with certainty -- clearly that which he knew was worth everything, that which he knew was clearly something real for him, otherwise it would not have yielded something so luminous as the legacy of artistic masterpieces that they have left behind.

Although *Apocalypsis Cum Figuris* continued to be performed numerous times throughout the world for the next thirteen years (until 1981 and the death of Antoni Jaholkowski, who played Simon Peter), by 1970 Grotowski and the Laboratory Theatre was moving into a new realm of connected thought, research and experimentation, what Grotowski referred to as 'paratheatrical experiences.' The trust that Grotowski asked of Cieslak did not diminish during this 'exit from theatre'. Surely this massive shift must have been nothing short of staggering to Cieslak and other actors of the Laboratory Theatre who, at this point, must have felt that they had given everything to the pursuit of 'theatre', a theatre that now seemed on the brink. It must have felt as though their entire world was being yanked out from underneath their feet. Following Grotowski through this next phase of his artistic and spiritual development demanded an enormous trust. Yet, "(f)or Grotowski, each production was always considered to be his last. With Apocalypsis, this fact became apparent very early in its development" (Findlay 174).

> "Ten or eleven years ago" says Cieslak, "Grotowski had the vision of where he was going with the paratheatrical work – but no one in the company really comprehended. He knew, but we didn't." Cynkutis picks it up from here. "In the period 1970 to 1973, we seemed to be wasting a lot of time because of a lack of understanding. Grotowski had the sense of where he wanted to take us, but at first we didn't understand. Now…today" – he smiles – "we understand better". (Findlay 174)

Though Grotowski's teaching evolved throughout his life and career, the one aspect that remained constant was his belief in the honesty and self-penetrating process unmasking, of unveiling, revealing that which is of true value. Grotowski's constancy conjures images of *The Constant Prince*, of the martyr who endures torture, pain, and agony, but

refuses to submit to the unjust laws that he does not accept. The symbol of the hexagram that appears in the poster of *The Constant Prince* illustrates the truth of the attraction of opposite poles. This simple and profound truth can be witnessed in every area and on every level of existence. This attraction does not exist as a static or fixed balance, but as a constant alternation between opposites that work in order to achieve and maintain a state of a balance; it is from this harmonious state that the most luminous works of art are created. In theatre, as in life, there exists a constant succession of opposites:

> waking and sleep, work and rest, health and sickness, weakness and strength, joy and sorrow – all these different states and conflicting energies are necessary. We call some of them 'good' and others 'evil', but the good and evil are friends. We must simply be watchful and aware of what is going on within us, knowing that after joy comes sorrow, after hope comes discouragement, and vice versa. (Aivanhov 119)

The oft quoted words of the ancient mystic Hermes Mercurius Trismegistus[3]: 'That which is below is like that which is above, and that which is above is like that which is below, to work the miracles of one thing' resonates as I contemplate the relationship of Grotowski and Cieslak, master and disciple, director and actor. How can the higher and the lower produce 'the miracles of one thing'? The answer is simple: it happens through a marriage of the two. As long as the higher and lower remain divided, they will never produce a miracle. For Grotowski and Cieslak, the miracles abound, but perhaps the most miraculous of all the miracles bestowed upon them was the gift of a relationship in which two minds and two hearts met, where tears and laughter mixed and a true and everlasting bond was formed.

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[3] According to Manly Hall, author of *An encyclopedic outline of Masonic, hermetic, quabbalistic and Rosicrucian symbolical philosophy*, Hermes Mercurius Trismegistus is "Master of all arts and sciences, perfect in all crafts, Ruler of the Three Worlds, Scribe of the Gods, and Keeper of the Books of Life, Thoth Hermes Trismegistus—the Three Times Greatest, the "First Intelligencer"—was regarded by the ancient Egyptians as the embodiment of the Universal Mind. While in all probability there actually existed a great sage and educator by the name of Hermes, it is impossible to extricate the historical man from the mass of legendary accounts which attempt to identify him with the Cosmic Principle of Thought" (Hall XXXVII).

Abstract: Chapter Two

Grotowski's theatrical work is intricately connected, both philosophically and practically with traditional Balinese theatre. Grotowski was inspired by the manifestos of French dramatist, Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) who attended a Balinese performance at the Paris Colonial exhibition in 1931. The ritual of Barong was a prominent element of this performance. Barong had a significant impact on Artaud's aesthetic consciousness at the time, and confirmed his belief that eurocentric theatre was lacking a sense of the metaphysical 'danger' that is so prominent in Balinese theatre. This sense of danger inspired Artaud's theatrical concept of 'cruelty' as outlined in *The Theatre and Its Double*. 'Cruelty' refers, in part, to the physical rigor of training; Richard Schechner elucidates this aspect of 'cruelty' through his own concept of *ritual mastery*. In Bali, theatrical rituals are a kind of offering that are ephemeral in nature (an important quality that is common to Grotowski's work as well). The ephemeral nature of theatrical rituals is a key to understanding trance. Barong, which is one of the most important theatrical rituals of transformation in Bali, serves as a poignant case through which I explore the phenomenon of trance. In trance, performers enter into states of consciousness that theatre anthropologist, Victor Turner has termed 'liminal'. These states not only play significant social and spiritual functions in Balinese theatre, they are pivotal in Grotowski's theatrical work as well. In liminal states of consciousness the body itself becomes an agent of power, capable of communicating knowledge (social, spiritual and political) through the dynamic energetic transference that occurs within and between performers as well as audience members.

Theatrical and Ritual Transformations

Schopenhauer believed that the only way to grasp *essence* is to totally merge oneself with it, to acquiesce, or "lose" oneself entirely in its pursuit. According to Schopenhauer, "losing of oneself", what Lendra calls the "submission to what one is doing" (Int. 11 August 2005) is a state that one achieves when one is no longer able to separate the perceiver from that which is being perceived. "(T)he two have become one since the entire consciousness is filled and occupied by a single image of perception" (Schopenhauer 1: 178-9). Schopenhauer's concept of "losing oneself" parallels Lendra's description of Grotowski's work as moving actors towards a freedom of expression akin to children. According to Lendra

> we want to become children again, how do you want to become children again? Only to tie yourself with all elements of techniques, of relationships between teacher and student, of actor and director, relationship between the techniques that you have to learn and art that you have to do...these are techniques to *bind* your body and your brain so that they don't mess up with things. (Int. 11 August 2005)

Grotowski suggests that in order to embody this childlike way of being an actor must go through a process of transformation in which,

> by casting off his everyday mask, (one) makes it possible for the spectator to undertake a similar process of self-penetration. If (one) does not exhibit his body, but annihilates it, burns it, frees it from every resistance to any psychic impulse, then (one) does not sell (one's) body but sacrifices it. (One) repeats the atonement; (one) is close to holiness. (Grotowski 3)

Grotowski's statement echoes the sentiments of French theatre visionary, Antonin Artaud, who saw "the whole active, poetic way of visualizing stage expression (as) lead(ing) us to turn away from present-day theatre's human, psychological meaning and to rediscover a religious, mystical meaning our theatre has forgotten" (Artaud, *Artaud* 108). Artaud believed that theatre held the potential to act as a sacred space where a

dynamic process of inner transformation could occur. In this space, spectators would be confronted by the forceful presence of actors stripped naked of their deceptive masks. Instead, like the Balinese, they would don masks of ritual as they lost themselves in the communion of trance. This torrential wave of uninhibited will-less expression that surfaces through liminal states of consciousness is something that Artaud termed "pre-expressive".

Artaud is a pivotal link between Grotowski and Balinese theatre. By exploring his thoughts and ideas, one can gain a clearer understanding of both Balinese and Grotowski's philosophy of theatre, especially the power and presence of the actor. In Bali, like in Grotowski's theatre, trance and liminal states of consciousness are a way in which the body acts as an agent of power. Artaud attended a performance of ancient Balinese theatre rituals at the Paris Colonial Exposition in early August 1931.

Plate 2.1
A poster image of the Paris Colonial Exhibition 1931. In the right hand corner one can see the Balinese pavilion, the fine print reads: "Une porte de Paris s'ouvre sûr le monde" Paris' door opens to the world)
"le plus beau voyage à travers le monde" (The most beautiful trip across the world)
Source: *Il Teatro Al Di La Dek Mare* (Savarese 82). Originally from "L'Illustration", Parigi (1931).

Artaud articulated this distinct shift in consciousness that this performance precipitated in *The Theatre and Its Double.* Artaud writes:

> In fact the strange thing about all these gestures, these angular, sudden jerky postures, these syncopated inflexions formed at the back of the throat, these musical phrases cut short, the sharded flights, rustling branches, hollow drum sounds, robot creaking, animated puppets dancing, is the feeling of a new bodily language no longer based on words but on signs which emerges through the maze of gestures, postures, airborne cries, through their gyrations and turns, leaving not even the smallest area of stage space unused. (Artaud, *Artaud* 98)

The vivid and colorful images Artaud poetically renders, reveal the complex and intricate ways in which this experience impacted his conception of theatre at the time. He called upon these insights to fuel his vehement attack upon Western representational theatre which he felt had lost a physical, tangible stage language, one that appeals to the audiences' senses in order to precipitate a philosophical and metaphysical experience.

Artaud continued to refer to Balinese theatre throughout his life; it gave him renewed purpose, inspiring him in his passionate quest to transform theatre into a birthing ground for a new aesthetic consciousness, one that would involve a re-sacrilization, a re-ritualization, and a re-mythologizing of the art form and practice. Artaud's experience at the Colonial Exposition was a key point of contact with an unfamiliar theatrical, cultural, and spiritual tradition; his acute perceptiveness and philosophical inclinations (his understanding of cabbala, alchemy, Gnostic Christianity and various eastern philosophies including Hinduism and Buddhism) contributed to this connection. Artaud's experience, like Balinese theatrical rituals themselves, was liminal, metaphysical and transformative. The Balinese performance inspired within him a realization of a spiritual power inherent within the theatre.

In order to discard representation and its implicit judgments and fully engage in the present moment with spontaneous intensity, he devised the concept of "cruelty". In *The Theatre and Its Double,* he states:

> Current theatre is in decline because on the one hand it has lost any feeling for seriousness, and on the other for laughter. Because it has broken away from solemnity, from direct, harmful effectiveness -- in a word, from Danger. (Artaud 107)

This sense of "danger" is not only implicit within Balinese philosophy, it is a quality that is made very real and tangible through theatre. Artaud tapped into this quality that he articulates in a subsection of *The Theatre and its Double,* titled *On The Balinese Theatre*

> We are seized with a kind of terror when we think of these mechanical beings whose happiness and pain seem not to be their own, but to obey tried and tested rituals as if governed by higher intellects. (Artaud 101)

The way in which this sense of danger and visceral terror seized Artaud suggests that he grasped the essence of Balinese theatre: that through trance states, actors could give form to invisible realms, invoking and embodying the dynamic energetic forces that occur through the interaction of gods and goddesses, demons and the spirits of the dead. This is especially true of theatrical rituals like Barong where actors take on a shamanistic role, communicating with invisible realms. Artaud understood the essence of Barong, that "good spirits, in order to effectively battle the demons, must sometimes borrow their monstrous masks" (Osinski 89). In Bali, trance performances are by their very nature 'dangerous', for they involve opening the door to all types of spirits to come in and transmute supernatural forces to the actors and audience.

Artaud's concept of "cruelty" refers in part to the qualities of precision and rigor that are evident in every action and gesture of Balinese dance (Artaud, *Artaud* 119).

Artaud noted that the rigor and cruelty of the Balinese do not stifle creative flow, but, on the contrary, intensify it.

> In short, the Balinese produce the idea of pure theatre with the greatest exactness, where everything in concept and production is valued and only exists through the degree of its objection onstage. (Savarese 70)

Artaud marveled at the dexterity, control and accuracy of the Balinese gestures and lost himself in their intricacy, their rigor and exactness. It was within the precise mastery of their movements that he discovered a "profound scenic presence" (Savarese 68), one that he had yet to encounter. Just as Grotowski's actors follow a precise score, the encoded body language of Balinese performers does not imitate life, but rather re-creates it for the stage, thereby opening the door for spontaneous movements that originate from the Being.

In *The Theatre of Cruelty,* the "hieroglyphic actor" (Artaud, *Artaud* 120-123) faces reality with pleasure and pain, revealing a raw, elemental and primal self, s/he peels away deceptive masks and codes through which we function socially. Instead of communicating through words, the 'hieroglyphic actor' would communicate 'pre-expressively', bypassing corrupted, false meanings attached to the sign and the signifier. In doing so, theatre would cease to be a mimetic and representational activity. Instead as Schopenhauer suggests, it would merge with life. Artaud longed for a type of theatre that would merge with life; life would become theatre, theatre would become life, and in doing so would become a way of touching and tasting essence, the very core of Being. This lofty ambition is one that earned Artaud both ridicule and reverence within the theatre community. In his essay "The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation", philosopher Jacques Derrida deconstructs Artaud's metaphysical and

pre-expressive visions as being mimetic and representational. Derrida summarizes the paradox this way:

> Artaud kept himself as close as possible to the limit: the possibility and impossibility of pure theatre. Presence, in order to be presence and self-presence, has already begun to represent itself, has already been penetrated. (Derrida 249)

While Derrida was intrigued by Artaud's writings, it is apparent that he perceived theatre as being, by its very nature 'mimetic'; according to Derrida, achieving presence onstage involves a process that can be nothing other than 'representational'.

Plate 2.2

Plate 2.3

The Paris Colonial Exposition 1931. Bali was a Dutch colony. Dutch organizers painstakingly recreated detailed replicas of Balinese temples. These simulations were created in order to give the staged performances a quality of authenticity, to satisfy Europe's insatiable hunger for the exotic world of the Orient and to celebrate the 'superiority' of the colonizers.

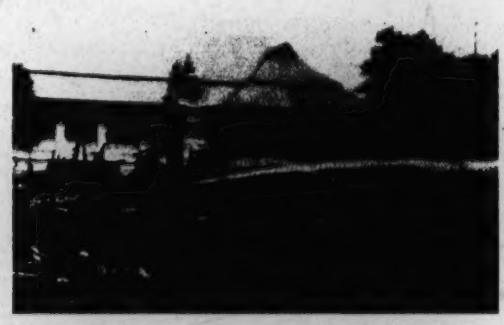


Plate 2.4

The Dutch Pavilion burnt to the ground. Some suspected arson. A group of surrealists who disagreed with the principles of colonial rule were never proven guilty. The Balinese performers, however, interpreted the fire quite differently – it was a sign of something that had its origins in the unmanifest. Source: *Il Teatro Al Di La Dek Mare* (Savarese 82). [Originally from "L'Illustration", Parigi (1931).]

While Derrida's contention may hold true of eurocentric theatre, this contention does not hold true of Balinese theatre which cannot be deconstructed as imitative since it is essentially a way of life.

Plate 2.5

Plate 2.6

Images of Balinese audience members attending a Barong ritual. The young, old, mothers and babies attend these open air performances which go on through the night till the early morning. There is food, laughter, dance, drama, magic, music, and spirit possession. The danger is real and yet there is a feeling of safety and awe of being in the presence of the invisible.
Photos: Bali Panesar

Richard Schechner expresses that "(t)heatre in Bali accompanies everyday life. There is no time out for theatre. To the Balinese theatre happens anytime, anywhere, and its gestures are continuous with the rest of living" (Schechner, *Performative* 71). It is often said that in Bali there is no word for art, performance is the yoke of life, inextricably connected with every aspect of culture and spirituality.

> The Balinese attribute a divine origin to music and dancing. It is said that Batara Guru, the Supreme Teacher invented the first instruments, and that Indra, the Lord of the Heavens, originated dancing when he created the incomparably beautiful dedari, the nymphs of heaven, to dance for the pleasure of the gods. (Covarrubias 216--217)

The Balinese believe with utmost sincerity that their theatrical performances are imbued with sacred rituals that bridge visible and invisible realms (the living and the dead, gods and demons, darkness and light) so as to create balance and unity in the cosmos.

The Balinese process of striving to achieve a cosmic balance between darkness and light mirrors the process of Grotowski's actors who strive to achieve a balanced relationship between opposing powers inside and outside their bodies. Like Grotowski's training, in order to achieve this balance, performers simultaneously follow a system of rules while surrendering their wills in order to enter states of trance. Performances are a type of offering to an invisible audience of ancestors, gods and demons. Like other forms

of offering, theatrical performances seek to "cleanse what is unclean, reconcile what seems irreconcilable, compensate, worship and appease, (and) avert danger" (Mabbett 104). Presence, in Bali, is not merely 'represented' by mimetic reproduction or replication of *'presence'* -- rituals of communion arise spontaneously from a state of *'absence'* or the *'void'*. Similarly, Schopenhauer assumes that this state of emptiness which he calls a "negative character" is highest point of authenticity in which one refers only to what has been "abandoned in the process of denying the will, never of what is "laid hold of" (Schopenhauer 2: 612). Lendra explains that a child-like way of being is characterized by emptiness:

> So you try to create emptiness, this is the time when the invisible power comes in. Because there is something that is empty. How can something come in when something is full? It's impossible. You have to be empty so that you can receive something: that power...In Bali, we talk about spiritual aspects of life, you want to create that emptiness, so that is the time that you invoke that power from within and from outside you... that's why the Balinese talk about the idea of *Goena-goena, and Goena-alit*, the power within and the power outside. How to bring that power in? …Don't make the brain messy, focus on something, something good. There is nothing more fascinating to see than when someone is doing something intensely, happily, honestly and *that* is a wonderful thing, because they are doing what they are doing, they are not talking, *doing* is important. Make the actor do what they have to do on stage, that means when they do what they have to do on stage, that's the time that *actually* what they are creating is emptiness. (Int. 11 August 2005)

This state of emptiness is transient; the goal of performances is not to remain in this state, but to create a state of balance between emptiness and fullness, destruction and creation, invisible and visible. Thus, the very nature of this art form is ephemeral. Lendra explains the ephemeral nature of Balinese art this way:

> If the elders say "keep this one, use it next year", then the younger generation would never make any efforts to make anything. They just decorate a little bit and say "that's it". But here, every year, every month, even every day, people make offerings, just make offerings and then you feel comfortable. You've done what you say is your responsibility and after you've finished making the offerings to the Gods and the spirits -- now you step on the offerings!?! See how you discover! This is what is done. The Balinese, in that case, have already made that connection for that particular moment then – JEONG! – done. (Int. 17 August 2005)

Grotowski's theatre, like Balinese theatre, involves developing a relationship with something that is invisible. The performance is merely a symbol of what one is actually giving; one is actually giving of oneself, giving away oneself, offering oneself as a gift to another. This type of giving is described as a selfless act, though in reality it is rarely an 'absolute' surrender. As one develops an awareness of the ebb and flow of the creative process, one may inadvertently develop a subtle cunning, realizing, either consciously or intuitively, that by giving of oneself one can also receive something else in return. Though one's surrender may be measured, the Sir Yantra (the spiritual symbol of the hexagram) suggests that the flow of this invisible energy moves across and around poles, the implacable and inevitable absolutes of life and death, exist as inescapable realities that descend and arise in cycles. Thus, even the visible or tangible fruits of our measured surrender, whether confined by fear of loss, or by self-gratification, are something from which we will eventually be weaned.

In Bali, elaborate towers resplendent with offerings are created for cremation ceremonies. It may take months and large sums of money to prepare the ornate and detailed offerings that eventually will be burned beside the body. For the Balinese, such cycles of creation and destruction are merely different aspects of the universal flow, and it is inconceivable to try to retain things in one state or another, which would only succeed in creating stagnation. One must accept that what has been created it is not to have and to hold forever and always, but rather to be given away as a gift. There will always be an opportunity to create, and another opportunity to give it away.

The Balinese Cremation Process

Plate 2.7

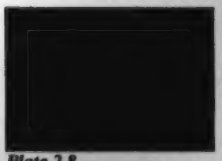


Plate 2.8

Plate 2.9

Plate 2.10

Plate 2.11

Plate 2.12

Plate 2.13

Plate 2.14

Plate 2.15

Plate 2.16

Plate 2.17

Plate 2.18

A tower of images depict the cremation process. Men and Women gather in the village to prepare for the ceremony, everyone has a deep obligation to offer their time and efforts (free of charge) to the preparations. Men carve and build. Women cook and create offerings. Preparation can take months and massive sums of money. This cremation ceremony was for the mayor of a local village. The body is burned in the sacred image of the bull. At the same time, another sacred animal containing offerings is burned. A massive cremation tower is burned later that evening and the ashes are returned to the ocean. Photos: Bali Panesar

Plate 2.13: Francine Brinkgreve, Kapal, 1983 from Hamilton, Roy et al. *The Art of Rice: Spirit and Sustenance in Asia*. Regents of the University of California, 2003. ***Plate 2.14***: Belo, Jane. *Traditional Balinese Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1970.

> everything must be destroyed. It's a gift, the whole thing is a gift to the person who is going to heaven...It is the same thing with the offerings you make in the temple to the Gods. Do the gods say "give me this, give me this" – no. The gods never ask for anything. The gods basically (say) "here's what you do, here's what you do" -- what a human being is supposed to be doing is to respect, to do the best in your life. And human beings thank them...And after they make the elaborate offerings, and you dance with excitement and everything, you don't take it back from the gods. You only take back maybe something that you can eat, the rest of the elaborate ceremony is something to be disposed, to be thrown away and the materials of which they are made of, in the case of coconut leaves, flowers, they don't last long. Well how about in the case of the tower? The cremation tower -- it could last? But still, the Balinese would say "take it home!? take it home?!?" They would not say that. It is (considered) dangerous to bring something like that home. (Int. 11 August 2005)

This ephemeral quality of art is also apparent in several aspects of Grotowski's work. In order to achieve his goal of reviving the theatre, bringing it back to life, he understood that he had to let it go, for the power in theatre, as in life, is determined by the flow, the movement, the cosmic dance of both destructive and creative forces working in conjunction. The ephemeral nature of his work had a strong impact on the various collaborative relationships that he formed. This is particularly true of the period when Grotowski left the Polish Laboratory Theatre in pursuit of paratheatrical research and later the Objective Drama Project. Kumiega explains that

> without the actors who performed it, it ceases to exist; for on one level it was drawn uniquely from the experiences of the actors involved, and the levels on which it operated were so completely interdependent that deconstruction of any single level results in collapse of the whole. (Kumiega 90)

The Laboratory Theatre's performance of *Apocalypsis Cum Figuris* would come to a complete halt with the death of Antoni Jaholkowski, who played Simon Peter. According to Lendra,

> after the actors are well trained and they perform to the maximum of their ability, their training is so high and then after a while, Grotowski basically stopped. He knew that he already found the spirits of the theatre and that experience had to be found by somebody else now, and so he stopped without making any previous announcements to his people. A lot of people criticized his way of stopping the group from performing, as though he was pulling the rug from underneath people's feet. The actors were so dependent upon his direction. Their commitment, connection, the close contact with Grotowski was so incredible – it was hard to separate. But, for Grotowski, probably, the fact that '*this* is ephemeral -- *this* in not anything that I have to contain until I die. This is the time to stop and let them grow on their own'. (Int. 11 August 2005)

Paradoxically, the ephemeral nature of Grotowski's work is the very thing that has kept it alive. It cannot be reduced to a 'method' or a 'system'; it is an aesthetic that is continually evolving. Like the Balinese children who continue to find their own ways to do what the elders have taught them, Grotowski's work has continued to evolve through highly trained artists like Thomas Richards. Whether the work is theatrical or paratheatrical, as Schechner suggests, like the ritual process, Grotowski's work has moved beyond a focus on a "finished product" towards an exploration of the whole performance sequence (training, workshop, rehearsal, warm-up, performance, cool-down, and aftermath) (Schechner, *Between* 236). Schechner calls the attainment of practical knowledge acquired through ritualization "ritual mastery". Ritual mastery involves structuring and solidifying knowledge into historical forms.

> As they begin their training the boys have little idea, except as spectators, about their finished performances. But somewhere along the way the training "goes into the body" …An illumination of sorts occurs: what is being written in the bodies of the dancers is read from the inside by each of them. (Schechner, *Performance* 273)

Thus, what once was merely

> rote movement, even painful body realignment, becomes second nature -- a full language of conveying detailed and subtle meanings and feelings…(that are) learned from the outside, "composed" and culturally determined, penetrates deep into the brain. What was at the start of training an external effect becomes during the course of training an internal cause. (Schechner, *Performance* 273)

Plate 2.19 ***Plate 2.20***

The process of training the body to move is similar to controlling a puppet.
(Right) An experienced dancer from Kapal trains a young legong dancer of Belaluan Source: Covarrubias *Island of Bali*
(Left) Lendra giving son Jaya (age 6) an informal impromptu lesson

According to Paul Connerton, internalizing rote movements is part of a process of

> understand(ing) the hidden 'point' that lies 'behind' ritual symbolism by an act of translation in which the encoded text of the ritual is decoded into another language (the language of symbolic movement and sound). To fasten upon the hidden symbolic content of ritual is to train attention on those of its features which it shares with certain other ways of articulating meaning in a structured form, particularly myths and dreams. (Connerton 53)

The actor training process is one way in which power relations penetrate and constitute the body. Sociologist Michel Foucault studied the ways in which the ritualization process bypasses "the subject's own representations, and even any process of internalization in consciousness" (Bell 202-203). According to Lendra, the power of Balinese arts is embedded within the form, so that

> without really knowing what it is, when you just do it, you get the power .... You don't really know the meaning of it, but you do it with much sincerity, with much liking, with much love – it's just incredible how much it takes you. You don't feel like you're only Balinese, all of a sudden you are a universal person. (Int. 11 August 2005)

At age eight, Lendra received initiation into the performing arts. At nine years old, he was already rehearsing, and by age eleven he was performing. Being chosen to become a performer entails a type of status; Lendra explains that

> the fact that you have chosen something, that means you have qualification for it. And in the case of me, at the time, my parents, they have a certain body type, certain kinds of features in their face, certain look of their arms...Those are perhaps criteria that teachers are looking for…it depends on how you behave too. And your overall look is important too. Of course, an experienced teacher would know. (Int. 11 August 2005)

A traditional Balinese performer will first perform in the village temple where they were initiated. As they perform they ask for the blessing of their gods. According to Lendra:

> Usually Balinese would think that without the assistance, the guidance of the gods, it doesn't matter how serious you are in your art, you are not going to go as far as what Balinese might think. So the blessing from the gods is very important. It is just like you do something with completion… Everything we do should have completion, completion in the Balinese mind is to relate yourself to a higher power. (Int. 11 August 2005)

In Bali one must form good relations with the invisible world, only then will one receive the appropriate support, encouragement and opportunities as an artist. Balinese

performers are characterized by a sense of sacrifice (*yadnya*) and selfless service (*ngayah*) of the individual for the sake of the whole. As Lendra explains:

> everything that you do in relation to *ngayah* in a place were you are doing it (especially in the temple) is so that you *know* that the presence of god is always part of you, available to you. You can't eliminate that. You are doing something for a special purpose, that special purpose is to thank god that you got this far. That term -- *ngayah* is very important in every aspect of Balinese activities because it carries, not only the reactions to what you are doing, but, your relationship with the higher power. That is a very important beginning of where things start here in Bali. If you don't have that relationship it doesn't matter how good you are 'technically' it is not complete. My first performance was in my village, in Pura Perasi which is in the place that we ask for blessings before we start rehearsal, and then, to get the best blessings, to accumulate more blessings from gods, and in your groups the time to have performances is during ceremonies, in any temple if possible, especially the big temples. You put your, its more like a proposal, to the elders who would do that for you. They would like you to perform for temples, the mother temple, the biggest temple in Bali, it is called Basakih, and then you would try to find a space and a time during a temple celebration especially in Batur temple – that's important. So any opportunities to perform in the temple are important, even for professional performers, because they are so busy with their schedules there is space for what we call *yadnya* -- to do something for free, with a good feeling so that you are recognized by the gods that your heart is pure for them. That is what is important -- basic in all Balinese performing arts, these activities are like a precious chance to be able to do something in relation to temple celebration and then we go to perform for regular entertainment areas. (Int. 11August 2005)

At that time when Lendra was studying performing arts, training was not done in the school; it was done in the village.

> The village has a group like this and your teacher comes to your village and stays in the village, because, often times the teacher comes from far away, and communication and transportation was not as easy before. So the teacher would stay in a village for as long as a week, a month, once a week or once a month and while the teacher was in the village you have to give them jobs to do -- that is teaching. So children are available from maybe twelve o'clock up, because they go to school (at least in the old days) you go to school from eight o'clock to twelve o'clock, we didn't stay in school all day. And so the teacher is with you and usually (in my time), children rehearse from one, two, three and there would be a group of ten or fifteen children specifically instructed to study from the teachers and usually we were accompanied by one drum, maybe the xylophone, maybe the time keeper which is called Kajar -- which is important. There are three or four musicians in the company who would rehearse with the children and then around four or three o'clock the whole group comes. They would rehearse from three o'clock to five or six, then they would go home and eat and then in the evening everyone started around seven or eight and it lasted around three or four hours and sometimes five. If you do that everyday for a year – that's intense, because you had no choice but to pay attention to the fact that the teachers are there for you. (Int. 11 August 2005)

It is customary that one might have one or two dance or music teachers. Rehearsals were based on specific instructions. Lendra started out as a musician and even at a very young

age he displayed quite a remarkable talent on the Balinese drum (kendang) a lead instrument in the gamelon orchestra.

Plate 2.21 ***Plate 2.22*** ***Plate 2.23***
Various Balinese instruments, Left and Centre: metallophones that comprise the gamelan orchestra, Centre: traditional Balinese drums (kendang) and Right: gongs of various sizes Photos: Bali Panesar

Despite his ability as a musician, while he was still quite young, Lendra was asked to shift his focus from music to dance. Lendra:

> I was asked to become a dancer to learn the dance and I began to learn to dance and again because of the intensity of the rehearsal, by the time you reach secondary school you already have enough techniques and then you would perform. You would perform with a group and then, in my case, I performed not only with the group, I performed in the village with the group in the school and to make the story short, after secondary school I went to the dancing school which was called KOKAR (Konservatori Karawitan Music Conservatory), it is like a conservatory of music, and at that time the techniques of music were already down …because the training was also intense, that is how I grew. (Int. 17 August 2005)

In *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* Catherine Bell, describes ritualization as

> prescribed sequences of repetitive movements of the body that simultaneously constitute the body, the power on, and the macro and micronetworks of power exists only insofar as it is constituted with and through the lived body, which is both the body of society and the social body. Ritualization is (a set of tensions) a strategic play of power, of domination and resistance, within the arena of the social body. (Bell 204)

Bell's description of the social body and the tensions that play into the production and reproduction of power is further illuminated by conversations that emerged at an ISTA (the International School of Theatre Anthropology) conference. Conference director Eugenio Barba directed questions concerning the techniques of Balinese dance to Catra, a Balinese actor. European participants wanted to know why Balinese choreography always appeared to them as engaging, yet very aggressive. In response, Catra began to articulate the dynamic qualities of Balinese movement patterns. Catra

found the clue in a conversation with a painter who showed him the difference between a 'leaning line' (diagonal) and a straight line. Catra realized that when he is on stage his body is always in the position of a leaning line and is being pulled by his muscles in two directions simultaneously. Because of this quality, which is so instinctive to any performer trained in Balinese technique that few of them would be conscious enough of the pattern to mention it, the Balinese actor is in a constant state of paradox. His muscles are struggling against one another internally even when the body is motionless, giving a dynamic quality to stillness. The 'leaning line' principle dictates that a body is always moving in two directions simultaneously, searching for equilibrium while in perpetual disequilibrium. According to Catra the actor must always *mencari keseimbangan di dalam ke tidak seimbangan* (search for balance where there is no balance). (Watson 64)

Lendra describes the seeming paradox in which Balinese dancers seem so fluid in their movements though there appears to be an undercurrent of tension, in which something is engaged as a way of sourcing power within the body. Lendra:

Grotowski said one time, 'when you are doing something, there is always something in tension', so 'in tension' means something is awake -- created by techniques or through techniques or created by composition. Because of that, your body and mind is bound ...everything is integrated and when something is in tension the stance seems to be the same, but actually if you look at it from the parts of the body that are awakened, when you sit down, you normally sit down, you try to find a pose in the back so that you can lean – you find something to put your hands like this, so you are not in tension. In performing arts, in Balinese especially, or as Grotowski would say 'there is always something in tension, something awake, something engaged'. What is engaged? It is actually the torso that is engaged. The position of the torso is, if you can relate it to yoga, if you can relate it to the awakening of kundalini ...because the torso is engaged, everything seems to be engaged, you need the torso to be awake, because that is the source of energy. When that is flowing whatever else you do seems to be fluid: singing seems to be fluid, movement seems to be fluid, everything is fluid, because you have a source to make it fluid. Without that, you don't have fluidity, it becomes too relaxed or too lazy. So when you make a position, actually you are talking about a dancing body. A dancing body is an awakened body. (Int. 11 August 2005)

Plate 2.24 Series

Plate 2.25 Series
Images of Legong dancers, notice how, whether standing (above) or seated (below), the torso is engaged, giving performances strength and power as well as subtle fluidity.

Lendra and Catra's description of the physical presence of the Balinese actor, constantly searching for equilibrium, the balanced interplay of tension and fluidity, takes on broader implications when framed within the context of Foucault's theories and observations. For Foucault, the body is a political field -- the most basic and fundamental level of power relations; it is

> the place where the most minute and local social practices are linked up with the large scale organization of power…Power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs." micropolitics of power…The social body is the micronetwork of power relations…(it) is the active site of "dispositions, maneuvers, tactics, techniques, functionings," it is a "network of relations, constantly in tension" …(in) "perpetual battle"… The individual is an effect of power, an element of its articulation and at the same time its vehicle. (Bell 202-203)

In Bali, individuals are always searching for a balance between the world of the gods and the world of the demons. This condition of dynamic equilibrium is evident in the movements and choreography of Balinese theatre where the muscles of the body are always moving in opposition to each other (Watson 61). "Power constitutes the individual, and the individual is the root of the constitution of power …(and) there are no relations of power without resistance" (Bell 203-204).

Transformations also occur at the level of the staging, costumes and masks, exercises and incantations, incense and music,

> designed to help the performer "make believe" in the literal sense -- to help the performer make her/himself into another person or being, existing at another time in another place, and to manifest this presence here and now, in this theatre, so that time and place are at least doubled. If the transformation works, individual spectators will experience changes in mood and/or consciousness; these changes are usually temporary but sometimes they can be permanent. (Schechner, *Performance* 171)

The Balinese demeanor has been described as measured, controlled, dignified, graceful, and tranquil; adherence to the rules of decorum are customary. As a result, Balinese

culture is often misconstrued as emotionally stunted. While it is true that their theatrical performances are "formalized acts, and tend to be stylised, stereotyped and repetitive… (and thus) subject to spontaneous variation…only within strict limits" (Connerton 44). As Jane Belo, author of *Trance in Bali* notes: "behavior springing from a deeper level of the personality is manifested (during trance states)" (Belo 1). According to Schechner, the repetitive rhythms produced by the Balinese gamelan orchestra generates

> a high degree of limbic arousal...(that) may, under proper conditions, bring about the unusual neural state of simultaneous and a high discharge of both [the sympathetic and parasympathetic] autonomic subsystems….(and thus) may precipitate altered states of consciousness. (Schechner, *Performance* 276)

Trance dancing has been described as a socially acceptable outlet for behavior that would be shunned in conventional circumstances. The fact that "all the varieties of trance behavior are culturally stylized… bear(ing) the imprint of cultural patterning" (Belo 1), suggests that though subjects may have reached an altered state of consciousness, they are not unconscious of the established social decorum. According to Goffman,

> the entranced person will be able to provide a correct portrayal of the god that has entered him [because of all the contextual knowledge and memories available; that] the person possessed will be in just the right social relation to those who are watching; that possession occurs at just the right moment in the ceremonial undertaking, the possessed one carrying out his ritual obligations to the point of participating in a kind of skit with persons possessed at the times with other spirits. (Schechner, *Performance* 258)

Thus, Bell describes ritualization as

> a way of doing things to trigger the perception that these practices are distinct…By virtue of movement and stillness, sound and silence, through which the body produces and reabsorbs these oppositional schemes. (Bell 19)

Belo explains that when subjects

> go into trance…the habitual decorum is cast aside. Other individuals who go into trance may seek a more quiescent change, sitting immobile during a ritual sequence until the spirit of the god "comes into" them, when they behave as an altered personality, demanding and imperious. (Belo 1)

In order to understand the nature of liminal experiences it is useful to return to Schopenhauer's concept of *presence* emerging from an *absence* or *the void*. In trance rituals, participants become invisible and this produces a result that is quite unexpected: the spirits intervene in the ceremony. In Bali, everything that happens in the visible world (*sekala*) has its roots in the unmanifest or invisible (*niskala*). According to Belo "it is the spirit that is being channeled, and through which the Balinese believe every gap in life can be filled" (Belo 6). According to Schechner, within the trance state

> the center -- the "normal I" -- is held back as an observing -- controlling self. Performance training develops a number of communicative skills one in particular involves arousing "the two extremes of brain activity without canceling out the center "I" self; (thus) the theatrical performer never wholly loses self-control. (Schechner, *Performance* 278)

The Balinese dancer in trance is in a middle position, what theatre anthropologist Victor Turner, in his book *From Ritual To Theatre*, has termed "liminal". Richard Schechner has described rituals as "behavioral displacements, exaggerations, repetitions, and transformations that communicate and/or symbolize meanings not ordinarily associated with the behavior displayed" (Schechner, *Performance* 256). In studying the transformational nature of the actor's consciousness, Grotowski identified two processes: in the first a performer is "subtracted," achieving transparency, eliminating "from the creative process the resistance and obstacles caused by one's own organism" (Grotowski 178); in the second s/he is "added to," becoming more or other than s/he is when not performing (Grotowski 175). "The half actor who "does not forget" himself is the knower, the half who "becomes the character itself" is the feeler. Exactly how this works neurologically remains to be investigated" (Schechner, *Performance* 274). According to Schechner "(t)o be in trance is not to be out of control or unconscious. The Balinese say that if a trance dancer hurts himself the trance was not genuine" (Schechner, *Performance*

175). Yet, a loss of control can be observed in trance performers as they enact subconscious impulses; though the altered states of awareness state appears to be held (at least to a certain extent) consciously. This relationship between consciousness and subconscious awareness is a seeming contradiction that I feel is imperative to acknowledge, though admittedly I have yet to encounter research into this phenomenon that sufficiently addresses this apparent contradiction. I can only conclude that this split in the levels of conscious and subconscious awareness appears to be an integral aspect of the mystical art of trance performance. According to Schechner

> (p)erforming artists are forever playing around -- not only with the codes, frames, and metaframes of communication -- but with their own internal brain states…trying to induce deep psychophysical transformations either of a temporary or of a permanent kind. The external art work -- the performance the spectators see - is the visible result of a trialog among: 1) the conventions or givens of a genre, 2) the stretching, distorting, or invention of new conventions and 3) brain-centered psychophysical transformations of self. (Schechner, *Performance* 278)

The formalization of ritual often appears to involve a distancing within actors of their private and social identities. Tambiah suggests that such distancing may be integral to what ritual does (Bell 217). Belo believes that the pleasure of the trance experience is connected with the surrendering of the self-impulse, this in turn opens a channel to farcical behavior whereby the trancer discards social decorum and rigid mores while submitting to being low, thus she concludes that being low is a way of achieving a degree of freedom (Belo 223).

In Bali, the intermediary between humans and invisible realms is not a priest but a medium, a healer known as *balian*. *Leyaks* present the flip side, left-handed magic or black magic to the balian's white magic; balian must be proficient in both white and black magic.

> He must know all about offerings and the prescribed ceremonies, and must learn the necessary spells by heart...He may be born medium and go into telepathic trance, during which he sees the cause of illness and its cure, or he may be a learned *balian* who has studied the lontars and uses them as a doctor uses his materia medica, or a scholar his books of reference. (de Zoete and Spies 88)

The weird art of these Javanese shamans acts as a vehicle transporting them from the land of the living to the land of dead; in the spirit world they are able to converse as well as dance with demons and deities alike. Through the use of ecstatic trance states *balian* concentrate their awareness and move inwards, deep within their core and then out and beyond the visible world. Balian are considered masters of ecstasy: from the Latin root exstatis, which literally means to stand outside one's self (Belo 6). There as several different types of trance states within Balinese theatre alone, varying in intensity as well as the nature of its expression, however, all such states tend to share some common characteristics. While in trance, performers move into a liminal space that is characterized by emptiness. It is from within this state of emptiness that a trance performer will evoke and/or invoke a deity, a demon, or a spirit of the dead. If they are possessed, typically their voices and demeanors will undergo a radical transformation as spirits talk and/or dance through them. In Bali, following trance performances, the medium/ performer is exorcised of his problems and those present at the ritual may also share a similar sense of release (Mabbett 110). According to Schechner

> rituals properly executed promote a feeling of well-being and relief, not only because prolonged or intense stresses are alleviated, but also because the driving techniques employed in rituals are designed to sensitize or "tune" the nervous system and thereby lessen inhibition of the right [cerebral] hemisphere and permit temporary right-hemisphere domination, as well as mixed trophotrophic-ergotrophic excitation, to achieve synchronization of cortical rhythms in both hemispheres and evoke trophotrophic rebound. (Schechner, *Performance* 259-260)

According to Bell "(r)itualized agents do not see themselves as projecting schemes; they see themselves only acting in a socially instinctive response to how things are" (Bell 206). In the ritual process relationships of power are drawn from the social body and are then reappropriated by the social body as experience. Specific relations of domination and subordination are generated and orchestrated by the participants themselves simply by participating. This "ability of ritualization to create social bodies in the image of relationships of power" (Bell 207) is especially evident in the Balinese theatrical ritual of Barong.

Barong, one of the most sacred trance performances in Bali, is a ritual of transformation. According to Schechner

> (t)ransformations in theatre occur in three different places, and at three different levels: 1) in the drama, that is, in the story; 2) in the performers whose special task it is to undergo a temporary rearrangement of their body/mind, what (Schechner) call(s) a "transportation"... 3) in the audience where changes may either be temporary (entertainment) or permanent (ritual). (Schechner, *Performance* 282)

Barong serves as a particularly poignant case to further elucidate the anthropological discourse of power. Turner would have described Barong as a "social drama" since, essentially the entire community is enacting a collective crisis and its resolution. This complex process can be analyzed through applying Turner's four phases of public action which he elaborates in *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, they are *1.)Breach, 2.)Crisis, 3.)Redressive action, and 4.)Reintegration.* I apply these four phases to the following analysis of Barong, since I have found them useful in conceptualizing the different components of this highly intricate and complex ritual.

The Theatrical Ritual of Barong

Schechner describes theatrical processes as the maps of a culture -- maps that involve transformations of time, place, and persons (human and non-human) (Schechner, *Essays* 161). Scenography is one element in which transformations occur. Theatre is created "out of a combination of natural and built elements....embedded in a matrix of legend and dramatic action" (Schechner, *Performance* 166).

> In Bali, as in many other parts of the world, the graveyard is the centre of magic activity. The dead are a favourite plaything of leyaks, and especially unborn children in the womb of dead women. It is in the graveyard that the witches' masks are exposed, to be re-charged with magic power. (de Zoete and Spies 88)

Performed in the *Poera Dalem* (the temple of the dead), Barong depicts *Calonarang* or *Tjalonarang,* an epic battle between Barong (Lord of the Forest) and Rangda (the Widow), a terrifying witch and ruler of the underworld. According to anthropologist Walter Spies,

> Barong is at once the most familiar and the most obscure figure in Balinese dance drama, the most concrete and the most abstruse, the most typically Balinese and the most universal. The Barong is a mythical monster with a long, sagging body built on a framework of bamboo and string, which is covered with various kinds of material (de Zoete and Spies 90).

Plate 2.26 *Plate 2.27* *Plate 2.28*

Three Barongs at a Full Moon Ceremony Photos: Bali Panesar

The holy coat of the Barong is often made of sugar-palm (the same fiber used in the construction of temple roofs: the dwelling of Shiva). Somewhere on their person Barongs wear a precious cloth (also used to wrap around sacred images with magical properties) (de Zoete and Spies 90).

> The Barong in action is animated by two men, one forming the front, the other hind legs. It is a special art to be able to move the Barong, and what the mask is peculiarly tenget (magically powerful) the dancers receive special blessing. The head-dress of the Barong Keket is a resplendent structure, though comparatively small. Made of polished scarlet wood, with protruding eyes and tusked jaws which clack when in motion, it is held by the dancer, its small alert ears framed in a wide-winged tiara of the same perforated leather. Huge gold epaulettes cling to his shoulders, and droop like great elephant ears when the Barong bends his head. From the chin hangs a beard that the essence of his magic power resides. (de Zoete and Spies 92)

Barong, who is reverently referred to as Banaspati Raja "lord of the forest", is a living symbol of an awakened consciousness, with its large open eyes and ears, it embodies Lendra's notion of "seeing that one is seeing – hearing that one is hearing" (Int. 11 August 2005).

> Rangda is the Balinese word for widow awe, horror. the mask of Rangda is used for a material revelation of a deity in its angry state…The stage representation of Rangda is no less fearful than her sculptured image in the Poera Dalem. The glistening white mask, with golden brow, immense protruding eyes, and huge white teeth and fangs that curve upwards to her forehead, is an object of terror and also of veneration. Like the Barong mask it lives in the temple, in a basket raised above the ground. (de Zoete and Spies 95-96)

Plate 2.29

Plate 2.30

Two different representations of Rangda on display during a full moon ceremony.

Masks are kept in the temple and given offerings for they are considered full of sakti (spiritual power).

> Every village has its own procedure and its own special sacrifices... Rangda masks are to be recharged with magic power, they are carried to the cemetery by night and placed on their baskets under a tree. An offer (is made of) an uncastrated male piglet whose head has been cut off, and gobblets of a young white puppy with a red-brown muzzle (which is also used on various occasions when spirits have to be propriated). (de Zoete and Spies 104)

When offerings are completed and the masks are donned, the actors immediately become possessed.

> Those who animated the sacred masks of Rangda, and Barong, must enter trance states while playing in their parts…When the players went in trance, they may go wild, rush out of the accustomed performance, trample on offerings, on the orchestra and collapse unconscious till revived. "They were not always thought to be "entered" by the god of the masked figure they were impersonating, but in some instances were believed to be entered by another spirit. (Belo 3)

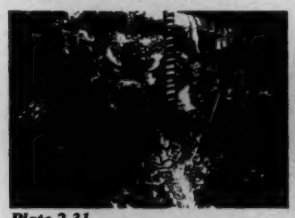


Plate 2.31

Plate 2.32

A total of eighty-eight Barong and Rangda masks were on display during this full moon celebration in Ubud. Brahmin priests offer holy water to congregation seated in awe of the deities, bedecked with fragipani flowers.

Western anthropologists tend to describe the Barong ritual in terms of a battle between light and darkness, good and evil. Balinese understand both Barong and Rangda as powerful beings that have emerged from the depths of underworld. In order to understand this epic battle as the Balinese celebrate and enact it, one must first divest oneself of the notion that darkness is 'evil' and light is 'good'.

> The Barong is not a Saint George battling with the Dragon; the Barong too is a monster of the same kin as Rangda. He is even regarded, in a mystical Tantric interpretation by a Hindu priest, as actually an emanation of Randga. (de Zoete and Spies 97)

Thus, Barong differs from Rangda only in so far as he has been bound by sacrificial offerings made in his honor; consequently, he is now obligated to protect humanity from Rangda's ruthless destruction, black magic and death.

> And though a demon too, his eyes also pop and he snaps his fanged jaws with seemly fierceness when faced with Rangda or other affronts to his dignity; the cluster of tinkling bells which hang from his absurdly arching tail somehow contrives to take most of the edge off his fearfulness. If Rangda is a satanic image, Barong is a farcical one, and their clash is a clash (an inconclusive one) between the malignant and the ludicrous. (Geertz 114)

Plate 2.33

Though Barong possesses qualities that are farcical Balinese would never describe Barong as "ludicrous". To them, Barong is dignified, majestic, mystical, and powerful.

Photo: Bali Panesar

Plate 2.34

Plate 2.35

Plate 2.36

As one enters the main temple one will find two Rangda masks with two Barongs on either side.

Plate 2.37

When the time is right, we enter the temple and kneel with devotion to the Barong; we maintain a safe distance from the Rangda masks. Left: Lendra kneels before Barong, a mask that has been in his village temple for generations. (These photos are taken with express permission of Lendra and the priest of the village temple.)

Plate 2.38 *Plate 2.39* *Plate 2.40*

After we make offerings outside the temple and receive holy water (tirath) from a Brahmin priest who sits outside the main shrine, chanting sacred mantras, we receive holy water in our open hands. We drink the holy water and splash it over our hair and face. We also receive fragipani flowers dipped in holy water and a stick of incense, the flowers are placed behind our ears and the incense is burned as an offering.

Photos: Bali Panesar

The Breach

> A situation that breaches regular, norm-governed social relations thereby creating a schism or schisms within a social unit-- family, work group, village, community, nation, etc. (Turner 37- 41)

The breach of the Barong ritual is a tale unto itself called *Calonarang* or *Tjalonarang*. Calonarang, otherwise known as Matah Gede, is rumored to be a witch, consequently her daughter Ratna Mengali has not received any proposals of marriage. Enraged by the suspicions of the villages, Calonarang orders her maidservants to spread pestilence throughout the kingdom. Soon new-born infants are dying under the influence of the witch Kalika's necromancy. The voracious evil spirit prevents the burials of the children by devouring their corpses. Rangda then enters the picture, come to spread plague and death upon the land.

Plate 2.41
Tjalonarang at Soekawati.
Rangda and dead child.
Source: (Spies and de Zoete 116)

The Crisis

> A crisis is a precipitating event that can't be over-looked, that must be dealt with. (during which...there is a tendency for the breach to widen). Each public crisis has liminal characteristics, since it is a threshold between more or less stable phases of the social process, but it is not a sacred limen, hedged around by taboos and thrust away from the centers of public life. On the contrary, it takes up its menacing stance in the forum itself and, as it were, dares the representatives of order to grapple with it. (Turner 37-41)

The crisis is the focal point of the Barong drama: the unceasing battle between Rangda and Barong who has been summoned from the underworld to protect humanity. The Crisis is not without its unexpected twists and turns. When it appears as though Barong will lose, his human followers (the kris-dancers) rush to his aid. Seething with vengeance and armed with magical keris daggers, they ruthlessly attack Rangda. Yet, the witch of darkness is not so easily defeated and casts a spell whereby the kris-dancers enter a trance state, possessed by *boeta-kalas* (demons).

Plate 2.42 *Plate 2.43*

Plate 2.44 *Plate 2.45*

Plate 2.46 *Plate 2.47* *Plate 2.48*

Plate 2.49

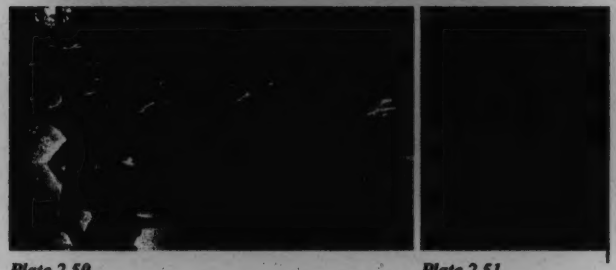


Plate 2.50 *Plate 2.51*

Photographs depict the various stages of the conflict.

There are various interpretations given of their action. In one they are said to be possessed by boeta-kalas (demons) who form the retinue of Banaspati Raja, or even to represent the boeta-kalas themselves, who want to show their readiness to die for their master. In another their desire to kill Rangda is enhanced by the spell she casts upon them, and having no outlet for their rage they turn their weapons against themselves. But the Barong's powers, stronger still than that of Rangda, makes them invulnerable. In yet another it is said that Rangda, disturbed in her meditations, avenges herself by striking her assailants with forgetfulness so that they fall inanimate. The Barong, thinking them dead, brings them to life again. But Rangda's power has turned their killing power upon themselves and it is only through the kris that they can find satisfaction. (de Zoete and Spies 97)

Redressive Action

Redressive action is what is done to overcome the crisis -- the crisis itself having arisen out of the breach. Redressive action can range from personal advice and informal meditation or arbitration to formal judicial and legal machinery, to the performance of public ritual. Redressive action also has its liminal features, being "betwixt and between,". (Turner 37- 41)

On the verge of stabbing themselves to death, Barong balances Rangda's black magic with white magic. Upon being summoned to save the village he clashes his jaws above the holy water (*tirath*) which a priest holds before him in a coconut shell. Barong dips the ends of his beard into the holy water and so it acquires healing powers. Caressing his disciples with his beard brings the 'kris dancers' out of trance, lifting Rangda's curse and releases them from her vile clutches.

Plate 2.52

Plate 2.53

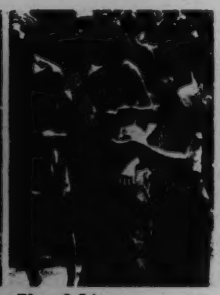


Plate 2.54

Plate 2.55

A young boy in trance is brought back through the power of holy water (tirath) a priest and another ritual participant whose duty is to assist the trancer -- offer their support.
Photos: Belo, Jane. *Trance in Bali*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1960.

Reintegration

> *Reintegration* is the elimination of the original breach that mothered the crisis. Reintergration occurs through healing and eliminating the breach. It consists either of the reintegration of the disturbed social group or of the social recognition and legitimization of irreparable schism between contesting parties. (Turner 37- 41)

The Barong ritual has a distinct exorcistic component; the play ends with the boeta-kalas leaving the possessed.

> Trance performances are on or even over the edge: self-control is reduced to a minimum or absent, thus the necessity for helpers -- people who stay out of trance specifically to aid those who are in trance, preventing injuries, assisting the trancers as they come out of trance. (Schechner, *Performance* 278)

Villagers view the ritual of Barong with intense emotion -- emotions that are strong enough to induce within them a similar state of trance. "Subjects in this type of trance activity reported an overwhelming feeling of anger, of a sort which it was not customary for Balinese not in the trance state to experience or to express" (Belo3).

> At each Barong play the life of the community is somehow jeopardized. The dramatic victory of the Barong is more than a mere symbol of its preservation, it is a material pledge. Black magic, the force of death, is not destroyed, but it is driven away to the graveyard where it belongs; while the Barong, for whose safety his servants the villagers have shown their readiness to sacrifice their lives, returns in triumphant procession to the temple--as does also the mask of Rangda in its covered basket, already disembodied. (de Zoete and Spies 97-98)

Plate 2.56

Plate 2.57

Plate 2.58

Plate 2.59

Plate 2.60

A wonderful series of photographs that illustrate the process of smoking which is one way to draw spirits out of the possessed trancer so as to assist the process of reintegration.

Photos: Belo, Jane. *Trance in Bali*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1960.

Schechner describes the first theatres as ceremonial centres where people transformed nature into culture (Schechner, *Performance* 156). The Balinese make the invisible forces of nature, visible through performative rituals. Like Balinese theatre, Grotowski's work cannot be confined to a fixed method; it is ephemeral, a continually evolving process whereby performers do not merely represent character types, but instead, give form to the dynamic energetic forces at play in both life and the theatre. In the Balinese theatrical ritual of Barong, actors take on a shamanistic role. By communicating with invisible realms, theatrical performances become vehicles for spirits to transmit higher forces to the audience. Victor Turner analyses "social dramas" using theatrical terminology to describe how disharmonic or crisis situations are dealt with.

> These situations – arguments, combats, rites of passage – are inherently dramatic because participants not only do things, they show themselves and others what they are doing or have done; actions take on a reflexive and performed-for-an-audience aspect. (Schechner, *Performance* 166)

Rituals like the Barong provide a place and means for transformations to occur. During the course of these transformations, participants cross limens whereby they can embody different beings (Schechner, *Performance* 171) as well as energies both inside and outside their persons. By tapping into these sources of power, Balinese performers, like Grotowski's performers, become invisible in a place that is visible.

Abstract: Chapter Three

An early research and development report describes Grotowski's focus during the Objective Drama Project as

> (c)oncerned with those elements of the ancient rituals of various world cultures which have precise and therefore objective impact on participants, quite apart from solely theological or symbolic significance. Mr. Grotowski's intention is to isolate and study such elements of performative movements, dances, songs, incantations, structures of language, rhythms and uses of space. Those elements are sought by means of a distillation process from the complex through the simple and through the separation of elements one from the other. (Wolford 9)

The collaborative relationship between Grotowski and Balinese performer, I Wayan Lendra was one way in which these specific goals were achieved. In the following, Lendra shares his personal account of meeting Grotowski as well as his experiences working with him during the Objective Drama Project. Lendra's reflections on his own work during the Mystery Play, offers insights into the practical application of Grotowski's concept of a secure partner. In addition, Lendra provides some insight concerning the exercises from Balinese and Haitian traditions as practiced within the project. These exercises served to open up latent energies in the body, which in turn, provoked trance-like states of consciousness. This work had a significant impact on Lendra's aesthetic consciousness, not only did it reawaken an awareness of his early experiences training as a performer in Bali, but it also enabled him to integrate this traditional training with work that was experimental in nature.

Plate abstract 3.1

Plate abstract 3.2

(Right): I Wayan Lendra in the full costume of kebyar duduk (Photo: Sander Johnson) (Left): Lendra as a topeng dance character (Photo: Chris Hrusa) Photographs permission of I Wayan Lendra

The Intercultural Process: A Meeting of East and West

From age sixteen to twenty-two Lendra was not only performing, but also teaching in a highly disciplined context both in Bali and later in Jakarta. When in 1976 opportunity knocked on his door, he found himself thousands of miles away from everything that was familiar to him. At age twenty-two, Lendra began working on a Bachelors of Arts at UCLA. University life in the United States was worlds apart from teaching and performing in Indonesia. Having virtually no grasp of the English language when he began, Lendra went on to graduate and later completed a Master's of Arts, all the while supporting himself by teaching Balinese music and dance through the Music Department. The demands placed upon him by the academic world, combined with the stress and challenge of being displaced from his cultural roots for eight years, created a feeling of disorientation.

Prior to meeting Grotowski, Lendra describes this period at UCLA as the peak intensity of his work in art. And yet, he had the dreadful sense that he was losing something precious; the cultural context in the United States was not as conducive to creative ventures, and therefore, as a performer, Lendra felt that he was no longer prospering as an artist as he once had been in Bali and Jakarta. The university discipline demanded that he fulfill academic requirements which often didn't provide him with sufficient opportunities to mature as a performing artist; furthermore, explains Lendra:

> I began to lose, lose my connection with my art, my culture, and with myself. But, I was much more used to, exposed to the university surrounding, so that connection, maybe you call it a 'spiritual' connection or 'life' connection with Bali was beginning to diminish. (Int. 11 August 2005)

Lendra met Grotowski through his friend Sander Johnson. Sander was a participant in one of Grotowski's workshops in France. Prior to their introduction, Lendra knew absolutely nothing about Grotowski, who was considered by many to be the most influential directors of avant-garde theatre. However, unlike Johnson, who had to wait one year after her audition to receive notice from Grotowski, the director expressed almost immediate interest in working with Lendra. The audition or interview was a unique meeting that lasted approximately seventeen hours (from twelve o'clock in the afternoon to about five in the morning). Everything was impromptu, neither Grotowski nor Lendra had prepared anything. Grotowski simply requested that Lendra bring a drum. Though Lendra was an accomplished dancer, Grotowski didn't ask him to dance, instead he wanted him to play drums and chant. He casually asked Lendra about his family, but for the most part they sat in silence and stillness. From the moment it began, this initial meeting acted as a powerful catalyst for the work that was to take place, rousing Lendra to question his identity as an artist. Lendra:

> Sander took me to Grotowski's apartment and he smiled at me and then I said "Hello! How are you?" Then he said, "By the way, you are so Americanized." And since that time I began to think 'this is not anything that I should socialize, make any comments', I began to become quiet and make myself that I am Balinese. And then toward the day (it was) the one thing that led the knowing that I am Balinese...it blocked me from remembering anything of my university experience...Just like that! I went (back) to myself as a Balinese, right away. And that is how powerful the man is. His words are so simple and the effect is so powerful. (Int. 11 August 2005)

Though at the time, he could not have possibly imagined the extent of the impact that Grotowski would have on his life and his creative journey, Lendra had a distinct sense that Grotowski was someone special. Lendra:

> I noticed something unusual happened in Grotowski's apartment, that unusual thing is: there was a plant – that plant instead of growing outside to look for the sun's rays – the plant was growing inside, growing into Grotowski's room...Grotowski probably noticed that and he didn't do anything about it, he didn't cut it. (Int. 11 August 2005)

According to Lendra, this observation had mystical resonances akin to similar phenomena he had witnessed as a child while growing up in Bali.

Later Grotowski asked Lendra to do some chanting. And so Lendra began chanting. The song was a simple one, one that every Balinese would know, the *cak* from the *kecak,* known by westerners as the 'Balinese Monkey Chant'.

> In the kecak a large chorus of bare-chested men sit close together in a circle and vocalize a complex rhythmic chant. They accompany their human orchestra with group movements, sometimes quickly fluttering their fingers with outstretched arms, sometimes moving their shoulders back and forth, hands on waists, in pulsating, isolated staccato gestures as they turn their heads from side to side...The kecak dance is often called the "monkey dance" because the percussive chanting that accompanies the performance sounds like the chattering of monkeys. The name also derives from the monkey king Hanuman's army of monkeys who help Rama track down and recapture his abducted wife Sita in the Hindu *Ramayana* epic. (Orenstein 116)

The *kecak* or 'Balinese Monkey Chant' has its origins in incantation, an exorcist rite, characterized by spirit possession known as *Sang Hyang* (Orenstein 117). Today, the typical *kecak* performance reflects a mere glimmer of the ancient mysticism from which these chants originated. In fact, the mystical power of the *cak* chorus is the only truly ancient element in the *kecak*; unfortunately, this seed has been drowned under waves of elaborate vocal and physical rhythms as well as loosely adapted storylines that ironically enough, were a bizarre innovation of Western colonial influence in Bali, rather than an authentic Balinese tradition. In the 1930s, British anthropologist Walter Spies was commissioned by film producers in the West to choreograph a Balinese-like dance. The film producers were creating a documentary of the island and its people and they were bent on painting an exotic veneer that would satisfy Europe's insatiable hunger for images of the exotic other. Since its mutated incarnation as the 'monkey chant', *kecak* has become a tourist favorite, a theatrical performance in which the Balinese mirror the

stereotype of the exotic, primitive 'other' to those who have enough money to pay for what it is they have come to see -- definitely not 'the truth', but not a complete fabrication either.

Plate 3.1

Plate 3.2

The Kecak: Balinese Monkey Chant

After his mystifying introduction to Grotowski, Lendra's impulse was not to sing the elaborate rhythmic variations that have ironically become the defining feature of this chant, but rather to return to the *cak*, the 'seed' of the chant that contains the distilled essence, the *core* of incantation. According to Lendra, "Grotowski is not looking for the elaboration, all those are beautifying something that more and more is buried down -- forgotten by Balinese" (Int. 11 August 2005). During the course of chanting, which lasted several hours, Lendra sensed that he was being taken to "another level, another state of mind" (Int. 17 August 2005); there was a burning sensation in his heart and he felt like he was in a trance (Int. 17 August 2005). Grotowski recognized the chant as a seed of Balinese culture that was pulled out from Balinese performing arts as a presentation of that culture and he asked Lendra to teach it to the participants of the project. This chant was used throughout the three years in the Objective Drama Project.

> the song becomes more like mantra, it becomes more like evocation and invocation, you are drawing something in and you are bringing something out from you, it meets at a certain point. So I taught this to the participants (in the Objective Drama Project) that were about fifteen people. And the more that I sang it, the more something else was singing and the other participants were hearing something else, floating in the air around the ceiling, the sound of flutes came out from that...an incantation – it is something to attract another power to come in. And that is why we have trance, because we have incantation. (Int. 11 August 2005)

Lendra's first meeting with Grotowski had a profound effect on his consciousness at the time. Lendra:

> when I met Grotowski things all of a sudden went back to when I was in the village, so intense...intense meaning the surroundings, the context, nature, the students' interest in learning.. because of that, my chance to meet Grotowski was actually bringing me back to myself, my intensity that I had found. The intensity, the discipline came back. (Int. 17 August 2005)

According to Lendra, during the project, participants were placed in a situation where things were less, though not necessarily what one might describe as 'poor' in Grotowski's sense of the word. These conditions were crucial elements that enabled participants to connect with nature at a different level. Being in close contact with nature was an important aspect of the work, which meant that during the project, participants were far removed from anything pertaining to their daily lives. At the same time, the work entailed certain restrictions, like not talking or performing outside the confines of the project; the work required participants to make a real commitment to themselves, to Grotowski and to the work. The work was both physically and mentally demanding, participants trained eight hours a day and sometimes ten to twelve hours a day, from four o'clock to twelve o'clock and sometimes two or four o'clock. They worked seven days a week with no breaks or holidays and it continued with this degree of intensity and rigor for three years straight. According to Lendra,

> if we were doing marathon which was twenty four hours, maybe two nights of not sleeping, or one night of not sleeping – we were given food in the case of Irvine and the food often times was deliberately made to be salty or to be so hot. People don't eat hot things – hot food, and you don't eat much because the intention is that you eat less so that we could work, because if you eat a lot how can you work? Eight hours of continuous work, there may happen to be a fifteen minute break in between, maybe maximum thirty minutes at the time you lie down. And the place that we were working in was the dessert and dust is all around you, grass and what you call – cow--poo, surround you and lots of horses around and horses were like our audience or cows like our audience; at the time we did the actions the cows just stared at us. (Int. 11 August 2005)

Grotowski's philosophy of poverty has had a significant influence on Lendra, who believes that "one must tune down everything within the context of worldly things in order to be invisible in the place that is visible" (Int. August 17 2005). Lendra describes poverty as the act of

> eliminat(ing) that idea (of self-importance) from your actions, from your daily life. Self-importance is always self-destructive. By making yourself poor, many of those disturbances will occur, or not occur, depending on where you put your brain...When you are poor, you are doing the simplification of your life; you live the simplest possible way. Poor in the Balinese way was similar to that, in that you are conscious of the existence of spirits, the existence of energy around, the existence the gods (who) are just like your friends. (Int. 17 August 2005)

According to Lendra, Grotowski's concept of poverty is as relevant now as it was in 1968 when he wrote *Towards A Poor Theatre*. Lendra:

> Actually it is not only in the old days that we feel poor, now days we feel poor and at times we feel that we don't have enough. Anytime that you don't feel that you have enough -- that is the same thing as 'poor'. I think it is important to feel poor. Poor: meaning, not to have so many things that bother you: eliminate this, eliminate this, than this, than this, so you feel more free to the point that what Grotowski says 'poor is pure'. You want to be pure and how does it affect you when you are poor from a Balinese point of view? When you are poor it similar to when you are sick. At the time that you are sick, that's the time that you call gods, that's the time that you don't have enough to eat today or tomorrow -- that is the time that you relate to gods, that is the time that you feel how important is that. To be as honest as possible to yourself so that you can relate your honesty to gods so that you will be able to fulfill the simplest needs of human beings, that is: eating and maybe a little bit of shelter...As a matter of fact, to deal with dust everyday and to step on soil everyday -- that is very good for your body and that is spiritually very nurturing. (Int. 18 August 2005)

The monastic style of life that Grotowski described at length in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, in which members of the Laboratory Theatre were looking for a deeper sense of purpose and meaning, what some might call 'spiritual' knowledge, was also a feature in the Objective Drama Project, but according to Lendra:

> Grotowski never told us that we were doing 'spiritual things' and we were not going through a process of getting spiritual knowledge of any sort. Number two: the idea of fears was not there because we did not know that we were looking for something that was absolutely out of our reach. I was not expecting to become a spiritual person, therefore, I was not really thinking about 'can I do this?'...My fear was the fact that -- would I be able to do the exercises? the training, and working with him without going to perform? And that was a fear. Am I going to be able to be happy doing these exercises and a lot of them seem to be going over and over and over and for so long, hours, and never thinking

> that what we were doing wasn't good enough? So I was still in a process of saying to myself 'am I a performer on stage or am I doing something else other than performing that would never satisfy me? and that would never satisfy Grotowski. And will I be able to satisfy Grotowski by doing whatever he hoped that I could do? So the fear was suddenly on the part that I was not going to be able to perform outside. (Int. 17 August 2005)

According to Lendra, Grotowski's training contained several different elements that parallel training in Bali. Both training processes are marked by:

- Absolute silence from all present in the room (what Grotowski called "silence in saturation").
- A quality of mental and physical alertness by engaging the mind and body in exercises.
- Physical scores that require intense concentration accompanying each movement, together with respiratory and sound control.
- A respect for nature, leaving everything unaltered in nature (Lendra, 113 – 128).

All these elements were devised to awaken different levels of consciousness so as to introduce a way of being characterized by stillness, alertness, focus, and openness. According to Lendra,

> Grotowski is talking about how to be invisible in the place that you are visible. How to make the force more visible and to put yourself in the back...Whatever the seed – you bring *that* in front and you are secondary, you are only a vehicle. And that relates to trance. He's talking about trance. How to be powerful in the theatre – that's what he is talking about...That training is not only to do with theatre, but also how to be alive and be friends with others. ...the idea is that you are hearing that you are hearing, you are seeing that you are seeing...Awareness -- *that* is what theatre is supposed to be. (Int. 18 August 2005)

The Objective Drama Project involved numerous challenges; these challenges were catalysts for change. According to Lendra:

> When you stop and try to look at what the challenge is about, you face the challenge; at the time when you are facing the challenge, that means that your whole body is reacting, not only your brain, but your body. At the time when the brain is reacting, the body is reacting, the body and the brain are engaged, engaged in something, so that you have to face the challenge and meet the challenge and face it properly... Actually during that time when you are facing that challenge, your reaction is resulting in emptiness, the submission of doing something because you are challenged to do something. Your commitment creates something that as human beings we should have. (Int. 17 August 2005)

The techniques presented a challenge.

> Techniques will allow you to achieve a state of mind, because your body and your mind are tied up, tied up to those particular activities. If you do it properly, if you do it honestly and you submit yourself in doing that, then that invisible power is coming into you, that creates a strong sense of emptiness, because at that time you are actually empty, your inner power is empty from disturbances of mundane things. (Int. 18 August 2005)

In addition to the Motions, (a set of stretches and postures that Lendra describes in detail in his article "Grotowski and Bali: Some Parallels in the Training Process") *diving*, *sculpturing* and *current* were three key exercises of the Objective Drama Project. *Diving* involved running or walking through the field, moving consciously over the land. *Sculpturing* involved adjusting one's body to the particular nuances of the terrain. During the *current* exercise, participants followed the flow and direction of the wind, feeling the wind, sensing and aligning one's movements to its rhythm, direction, and intensity of its flow. During these exercises it was not unusual for participants to stop in front of a tree and

> adjust themselves to what is flowing inside the tree and what is flowing inside of you – so you try to become one with the tree and you try to become one with the hills and you try to become one with the current , the wind. That is the idea of the exercise, so in other words, nature is more important at the time than you -- and you adjust yourself to that. (Int. 11 August 2005)

The Haitian voodoo exercise of *Dhambala*, (named after the Haitian serpent deity: guardian of the crossroads) was an elaborate ritual requiring precise vocal vibrations. According to Lendra, the main feature of this exercise is in the undulations of one's torso. The steps are very simple, but the undulations are consistent and flow from one's legs up to the head. "When you do it for more than two hours, or even one hour, then everything you feel is just so alive! It's like awakening the kundalini, awakening of the chakra energy" (Int. 17 August 2005). *Dhambala* can induce trance states and according to Lendra this was something that happened quite frequently during the project. *Kundalini*

is a sexual energy that is commonly referred to as the 'serpent energy' in Tantric Hinduism because of it flow through the serpentine structure of the spine.

Figure 3.1
When awakened, this source of energy, which rests dormant at the base of the spinal column, moves up through the spine and creates an acute state of alertness; according to Lendra, it gives one more power, more focus, and more powerful presentation as a performer.
Image: Khanna, Madhu. *Yantra: The Tantric Symbol of Cosmic Unity*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1979. 69.

At different occasions during the project, Grotowski referred to the 'reptilian brain' in reference to *kundalini*. According to Lendra, the alertness that one experiences when one's *kundalini* is awakened, can be compared to a time of deep meditation;

> in this state you see things, you hear things, the invisible sounds – you hear, and you see, you see yourself, that you are seeing and you hear, hear that you yourself are hearing. At those times you know what they are saying (Int. 11 August 2005).

In Lendra's account of hearing flutes while chanting the Balinese *cak*, it is important to distinguish that the lofty sounds of flutes that played around the participants were not those of physically tangible instruments, rather they existed in an invisible realm and were evoked and invoked by the power of the incantation. Lendra's experience highlights the "invisible impact of the work on the environment" (Int. 17 August 2005) -- the power of the physical actions unites with something else that can only be discerned through exercising a higher level of awareness. These experiences gave Lendra a sense of strength that enabled him to not only face the challenge of the work, but to face challenges in other aspects of his life with grace and perseverance.

Though the rehearsals were intense, Lendra experienced something subtle taking place in his awareness. When rehearsals would finish for the day, instead of feeling exhausted, he found himself very much awake, hyper-alert as it were; he had an acute awareness of everything and a sense that everything was alive and moving. Lendra:

> The body is designed to be awakened. You have to wake up that body. For eight hours, what is that? We are trying to get the Being to be more pronounced than the flesh through exercise, many exercises...You get into the exercise and your body becomes more subtle, you become more agile, and something else that is bigger than you -- that is in your body (is awakened)...so you can't go to sleep right away and that is normal. How does that relate to theatre? How does it relate to intercultural theatre? All I can say is that I was put in a place that is so familiar and at the same time unfamiliar. Familiar because it felt like Balinese training when I was a child, training dancing, training music, just being. (Int. 11 August 2005)

For Lendra, the human aspects of Grotowski's work had strong resonances; he recalls Grotowski consistently encouraging performers to 'go back to their sources' 'go back to their origins'. For Lendra, the work not only related to theatre, but to one's way of being, one's way of being in this culture, and in this life.

> In a time that children should behave this way and that way, that is how you are trained in Bali when you are a child [at least in the old days]. And that training carries out in theatre. You don't separate that and it's reflected in theatre and the theatre has the power to express – 'Oh that's Balinese theatre! Oh that is Balinese culture!'. (Int. 17 August 2005)

This return to his cultural roots, to his original source of power, is a defining characteristic of Lendra's experience during the Objective Drama Project. During the *Mystery Play*, Lendra was asked to go back to his mother, he had to become his mother and the child sitting on the floor was none other than himself. The instructions, though simple, were immensely challenging; he was not to 'act' like his mother, rather he had to *become* his mother, Lendra describes the process as having his body *borrowed* by his mother; while at the same time his mind was *borrowed* by the child sitting down below.

'Mother' was a loose story about Lendra's mother singing a devotional song while making an offering to the gods.

> my skin, in Grotowski's word, must change like my mother's skin, my voice must change to become my mother's voice...To become something, to allow someone else to borrow your body. Something else is coming in. Once you do that, the first thing that I have to do, I have to be as close as possible to my mother, meaning that I have to remember my mother as much as possible. The training of going back to your origins – it is so powerful. And he asked you do something that you really go back to – I went back to Bali when I was physically with Grotowski in UC Irvine, or where we work; to bring out the power of my mother in my body. And put myself down below, because my mother was talking to me. There is no place for me, except if I can make myself look at my mother sitting down there, so everything is so scrap out from me -- who I am – 'my name is Lendra, Balinese artist, have been all over the world to perform Balinese dance, perform Balinese singing' – there is no place for that ego to come out, my body was taken by my mother and I have to become my mother. (Int. 11 August 2005)

Grotowski's process of working with Lendra on *Mother* parallels his early work with Cieslak, especially concerning Grotowski's notion of the secure partner. Even during his work with the Polish Laboratory Theatre Grotowski maintained that one must surrender to a profound research of Being and that this research must be imbued with love. Such intimate work requires developing a unique relationship with one whom the actor can trust implicitly. Who this being is, or may appear to be, is less relevant than what they represent for the actor. The secure partner must somehow represent the highest Truth within the actor. It is through the relationship with a "secure partner" that the actor is guided towards the highest Truth that they know within themselves. This partner may be

> (s)omeone you are searching for. There is no single, simple answer. One thing is clear; the actor must give himself and not play for himself or for the spectator. His search must be directed from within himself to the outside, but not for the outside. When the actor begins to work through contact, when he begins to live in relation to someone – not his stage partner but the partner of his own biography – when he begins to penetrate through a study of his body's impulses, the relationship of this contact, this process of exchange, there is always a rebirth in the actor. Afterwards he begins to use the other actors as screens for his life's partner, he begins to project things onto the characters in the play. And this is his second rebirth. (Grotowski as quoted in Hoffman and Schechner 38)

The secure partner may or may not be a creation of one's imagination, its nature serves its purpose, that is: to act as a link to something that is invisible and ephemeral, yet entirely intimate, what philosopher, John de Ruiter describes as the *Innermost Being*. The secure partner guides by wooing one closer to the centre, towards what one loves and fears the most (a beautiful, but not necessarily a comfortable place to be in) for this has one perpetually facing the cost. It is always open, always honest and always gently guides one to trust, to let go and to move straight through the fear. Grotowski describes the secure partner as a

> special being in front of whom he does everything, in front of whom he plays with the other characters and to whom he reveals his most personal problems and experiences. This human being – this " secure partner" – cannot be defined. But at the moment when the actor discovers his "secure partner" the third and strongest rebirth occurs, a visible change in the actor's behavior. It is during this third rebirth that the actor finds solutions to the most difficult problems; how to create while one is controlled by others, how to create without the security of creation, how to find a security which is inevitable if we want to express ourselves despite the fact that theatre is a collective creation in which we are controlled by many people and working during hours that are imposed on us. (Hoffman and Schechner 38)

Grotowski's description suggests that the secure partner is an energy endowed with a form fashioned by one's imagination or intuition. Being able to really listen and follow Lendra's inner process enabled Grotowski to clearly see Lendra's creative potential. Grotowski maintains that

> (o)ne need not define this "secure partner" to the actor, one need only say " you must give yourself absolutely" and many actors understand. Each actor has his own chance of making this discovery, and it's a completely different chance for each. This third rebirth is neither for oneself nor for the spectator. It is most paradoxical. It gives the actor his greatest range of possibilities. One can think of it as ethical, but truly it is technical – despite the fact that it is also mysterious. (Hoffman and Schechner 39)

In *Mother*, Lendra's mother was his secure partner. The rehearsals of *Mother* involved implementing Grotowski's principle of *via negativa* in which layers are continuously

peeled away, making actions clearer and more concise. Lendra was instructed not to elaborate. Lendra:

> The first time I did the song: "too long", the second time: "five minutes longer", the third time: "good. getting shorter" -- to ten minutes, the next it becomes twelve minutes. "Cut it down" – what does he means by 'cut it down'? 'Cut it down' is to try the poorest possible way of singing, poorest meaning the simplest. You are singing-talking and that is difficult. Singing-talking. Yes! you *are* talking (but) the tones of the voice must be as perfect as you can – in the way we think of 'perfect', the vibrations have to be as perfect as possible. (Int. 11 August 2005)

During rehearsals for *Mother,* Lendra's brain was engaged through invoking the spirit of his mother into his body. Lendra compares this process of binding oneself to techniques, to Balinese methods of theatrical training. Lendra:

> See, when you are doing something, you are not allowed to concentrate on too many things, you are not allowed to do that. Balinese training is like that, especially when it has to do with ceremonies -- your mind is focused. You are reaching the invisible, whether it is the lower invisible, the higher invisible, or the highest invisible – your mind must be focused...that is the Balinese way of doing things every day in relation to making offerings, making ceremonies. In the arts we are also supposed to do something like that – you don't allow this big ego -- the fact that you are so good, that the singing is so good, making everybody so attracted -- so that you forgot. You forget. You are elaborating things and you forget the seed. (Int. 18 August 2005)

In order to bring his mother into his body, Lendra had to connect with all the cultural elements, the cultural and performative circumstances surrounding this ritual offering, this meant that while he was performing he had to adopt the same meditative state of mind that is customary in Bali. While making offerings, Balinese do not allow themselves to indulge in emotions; instead, as Lendra expresses, they move into a liminal state of consciousness, what he describes as a "middle ground sort of feeling" (Int. 17 August 2005) that is akin to a state of emptiness. These cultural elements served to connect Lendra to the deep psychic impulses in his body and through this process he returned to the time when he was a little boy in Bali. Lendra:

> I have to remember my mother, I have to remember the context...All those contexts are brought back to my awareness and the fears that come in when you were a child at that time and how sublime things were when you experienced things in your childhood. *Those* things come in and how gods are around you to make you feel that you are

comforted, you feel full of respect, you feel awe-some. You feel in awe of what happens...you are going back to a place where your mom is always present in your mind, but not yet in your body, you want to bring your mother to come in. (Int. 11 August 2005).

Another solo piece that Lendra worked on as part of the *Mystery Play* was based of the mystical experiences of the Indian mystic Bahasa Ramakrishna (1836-1932) who in his forties recounted a vision of the Hindu god, Krishna, that he had while playing in the fields during his youth.

Plate 3.3
Bahasa Ramakrishna (1836-1932)
Source: Isherwood, Christopher. *Ramakrishna and His Disciples.*
New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959.

Grotowski asked Lendra to become Bahasa and imagine the image of Krishna as Bahasa had recorded in the accounts of his mystical visions. Krishna, who in the vision appears as a boy of about five or six years old (though awesome in size), is described as black and yet radiant and indescribably powerful. Krishna appears in a field with his flute in hand, beckoning Ramakrishna to come and play. Without any partner, Grotowski asked Lendra to become Bahasa Ramakrishna and look for Krishna. Lendra worked on developing the piece over the course of two years, and at one point in Italy Lendra presented himself to Grotowski once again.

> The space was so big and I had to create everything,... (I was) lying down. Restless and not able to go to sleep and then I was dreaming, sleep talking, I was recalling a song which is actually a Balinese song – I used *that* to call Krishna and in between sleep-talking, and sleep-walking, I woke up. And all of a sudden I saw the rays of Krishna! So powerful! I had to recover myself to bring myself back. And I had a flute and I asked Krishna [I began to interact with him. And I began to play the flute.] And I asked him "is this your flute?" "Yes, this is my flute and you can use it." So I played and Krishna began to dance and he began to ask me "let's go to the field." Just those imaginary things. It becomes true to me. I was really talking to Krishna and saw him as a child – naked, I was a child, but I was wearing white cloths and I saw him and I just kept playing the flute, Balinese in nature, running and running and finally, he asked me to run so fast and I had to follow him as fast as possible. And finally he ran down to the river and he wanted to get some drink – to get some water down there and I kept calling him – "Krishna! Krishna!" "Bring me some water" [in Balinese]. And I felt like he was just there and he came up and brought me some water and I drank it and then he ran again, ran again and he kept dancing and kept playing flute, my flute was actually taken by his movement and the emotion – I mean the sound. And then he kept going back and back and back and finally JOOP! – just disappeared. And I kept calling him. "Krishna! Krishna!" And finally he totally disappeared and I didn't see him anymore – and I was just done, I felt like I was in another world and I looked at Grotowski and he only said – he didn't say anything. (Int. 18 August 2005)

After two years of rehearsing in a way that demanded such a deep level of commitment, Lendra would perform this piece only once. Like an offering, a gift of love, this work was given away. All that remains is the energy that was created in *that* moment, a moment of communion. While the experiences recorded herein have disappeared, returned to the invisible as it were, one can still catch a glimmer as Lendra recounts these experiences; the ephemeral has left its trace and continues to dance to its song with delightful glee.

Abstract: Chapter Four

The current phase of Lendra's evolution as an artist is fascinating. In the following I explore the way in which Lendra is integrating his experiences from the Objective Drama Project with his current creative pursuits. Though he is not performing per say, he has continued to attune himself with the deep psychic impulses that awakened during his years with Grotowski as he performs a different kind of ritual, creating an offering to his gods, the arts and humanity. For over five years Lendra has been living with his family in the capital of Denpasar. There, he has been building a centre for actor training – *Villa Lendra*. In the following, I explore Lendra's rationale and impetus for building this facility as well as the philosophy that will determine the pedagogy he will employ as director of this unique facility. Visuals of the project offer a compelling insight into a unique creative process that has its roots in Balinese traditions, but which is also deeply inspired by Grotowski's philosophy and method of training.

Villa Lendra: To the Gods, To the Arts, To Humanity

Having traveled the world as a performer and teacher, Lendra is familiar with the feelings of insecurity that seize hold on one's person as one is confronted with being culturally out of context. Throughout his years spent outside of Bali, Lendra has found peace and solace when he returns to his ancestors and his gods: the gods in his temples, the highest God – *Sangyang Wedi* and his family shrines. Making offerings is one way that he has reconnected himself to his source. By nourishing this connection he feels secure and protected, able to move forward into ever increasingly new and unfamiliar settings and situations without losing a sense of who he is and where it is that he comes from. According to Lendra,

> the family shrine is like a string, an invisible string that pulls you and always something that people have to worry about and they are so conscientious and that is what makes them Balinese and there are also shrines in the village. And in each village there are three shrines which are called *Poora Teega* and there is *Poora Doso* which is the central temple and *Poora Desa* which is community temples and *Poora Dalem* which is the death temple. Without these three temples a village is not identified as a village, so people who live in the village must worship these three temples – from birth to death they have to relate to these three temples; when they are born they have to report to the temple that somebody is born and they have to get the holy water, when they do ceremonies without holy water from the three temples the ceremony is not complete – see how much they are actually tied to that -- without that holy water from the family shrine you cannot finish anything – if you have a birthday in Bali, a Balinese birthday, you need to get holy water from the shrines – from the three village temples, from the high priest, at least you get four or five holy waters to do the birthday ceremony. So you are held, which to Balinese is so comfortable, without this they are not comfortable. (Int. 18 August 2005)

Lendra's deep sense of responsibility to the highest God (*Sangyang Wedi*), and his ancestors is characteristically Balinese; however, he expresses that

> I owe to the gods, I owe to my arts, I owe to humanity. In relation to arts, I feel very strongly, either by my experience with Grotowski, or my schooling in America, *my* experience, the fact that arts that I know in Bali or in many places – they don't have facilities to explore and to learn and to make sure what we have -- we can inherit in the best that we can. We don't have the facilities, the facilities are only schools, universities, or wards that we have that are called *banyar* – but, they are not strong enough in their commitment to make something that is so deep, that is Grotowskian, that is humanity. That is what I need to do, provide the facility, possibly provide the teaching. (Int. 18 August 2005)

When Grotowski did his theatrical research with the Polish Laboratory Theatre, he faced adverse economic and political circumstances; in order to survive, let alone thrive, members of the Laboratory Theatre had to adopt a philosophy of poverty. While it is true that he received some funding and facilities from the state, it was Grotowski's perseverance, commitment, and stamina to do the work that made it the success that it was. According to Lendra,

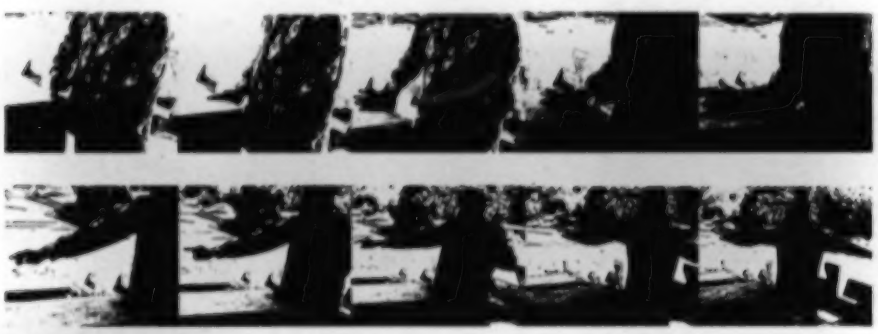
> in Bali, in the old days, kings and queens and nobilities provided funding for artists, so that the way that we inherit from the past is so highly powerful, highly beautiful, the quality is so beautiful. And nowadays creations are not as beautiful as the old days. Kings provided everything that the artists needed at the time so that the artist could continue to work in the arts and the artists were not necessarily nobilities, many of them were, or most of them were non-court people, meaning they were not nobility – that's why Balinese art spread through the villages as you know today. (Int. 17 August 2005)

Grotowski's perseverance and commitment is an inspiration to Lendra who is building a facility for performing arts in his household compound. When *Villa Lendra* will be complete it will include four rehearsal spaces, typical Balinese household shrines (a little bigger and more elaborate) except that unlike a typical Balinese shrine which is set on the ground, the shrine of *Villa Lendra* is on a roof top, but connected to the earth by seven meters of earth. According to Lendra "shrines are like the middle between the sky and the earth, so if you want to build a shrine bring the earth up as high as you can" (Int. 18 August 2005). *Villa Lendra*, which is still in its formative stages, is Lendra's tribute to the arts, his ancestors and his gods who have given him so many opportunities during his lifetime. Lendra:

> Whatever I learnt, whatever I experienced, whatever I read, whatever I learnt in the classroom, those are because of art. I have the commitment to do something for the art, to find the facilities, this is the facility that I am making, big space, many rooms, and I want to express my thanks to my ancestors, my gods who are giving me the best possible input for my well-being and development. (Int. 18 August 2005)

Traditional Balinese houses and buildings are built in very specific ways, set facing specific directions that correspond to the sacred Balinese sites as well as the constellations. In Bali, this detailed science/ art form is called *Koosala Koosali*; Lendra has been studying the fundamentals of this extensive art form, researching various Balinese signs and symbols, and experimenting with different ways to arrange space according to these principles. Lendra:

> I am trying to make the most traditional Balinese house except it is on top of concrete, on the second floor. I know that one of those ideas of power is being lost from the arts...elements of culture in the form of buildings – we are also losing this. People in Bali – we say the position of the kitchen is in the South-west, that is normal, and across from the kitchen is the position of the goddess of the rice paddy's house, that is where the temple of the goddess of rice is supposed to be seated. Those arrangements have the knowledge of *Koosala Koosali* [in China we call it Feng Shui]. Those are being lost, so in a place of the kitchen many Balinese over here [even those that understand the tradition] they just build a house where they sleep. In the place where the shrine where the goddess of rice is supposed to be they put this building next to a cottage and rent that to tourists and tourists sleep in the place where the rice goddess is supposed to sleep. Elements like this, a lot of them are been confused and a lot of Balinese move on, based on their needs – they don't go back to the idea of nature. So what I am trying to do is go back to nature. (Int. 11 August 2005)



Plates 4.1 Series
I Wayan Karja, Dean of the arts department at Udayana University, demonstrates the basic principles of *Koosala Koosali* in which the body is the measuring stick which all traditional structures such as the on campus building (seen in the background) were built.

Lendra's concept is to design a space where nature will have more prominence than buildings. According to Lendra, "it shouldn't matter how many rooms you have or how big the house is – if you don't have nature surrounding you – you are

defeating your own self" (Int. 17 August 2005). In this centre, Lendra also intends to create a sanctuary for rare trees and plants of all sizes that are necessary for ceremonies and used in traditional Balinese medicines. In addition, Lendra owns several pieces of land in the Balinese mountainsides that he intends to use for different training retreats. The village of Lendra's ancestors is in Gianyar city east of Ubud, but Lendra decided to build *Villa Lendra* in the Denpasar where he has lived since 1987. When he began building, Lendra did not have a vision of how *Villa Lendra* would look when completed, in fact, he has never made any blueprints on paper; everything has been happening in sections, and using the traditional ways of measuring. According to Lendra,

> there are seeds over there, the seeds of life, as Grotowski would say 'the seeds of life', 'the seeds of culture' are over there. Except a lot of families forget that there is meaning in there. It is that meaning that carries us as human beings – carries us as a culture, as a cultural person. In Bali, we happen to have a culture that is so wonderful, so strong, if it is possible to maintain this and Balinese are very concerned about how to maintain that. The influence of ideas of globalization, or the ideas of what an Indonesian is supposed to be – we have to participate in technology and we get squeezed by the needs of this and the needs of that – at the same time we try what our tradition tells us. (Int. 18 August 2005)

According to Lendra, the Balinese have inherited a wealth of truly unique traditions, but in the face of globalization it is even more important that they make a concerted effort to maintain these traditions or else Bali risks their loss. Lendra's concern for the continuation of Balinese traditions has become more prominent in his consciousness since the birth of his son Jaya (age six). Although construction of *Villa Lendra* is well on its way, Lendra expresses that

> I don't have any expectation of when it is going to be completed, but I know one building with a foundation relates to another foundation and if I could not finish it myself and if somebody comes in and checks the positions of the foundation, how one is building is in relation to another, they can continue what I am doing. So probably if I died, Jaya would be able to do it. (Int. 17 August 2005)

Grotowski's philosophy of poverty has had a profound effect on Lendra's consciousness. However, the ways in which poverty plays a part in Lendra's approach to

building Villa Lendra reveals a complexity of thought and an instinctive understanding of human nature.

> You have to comfort them because they don't know what you're talking about. They don't know what you're talking about when you say 'you have to be poor, you have to be simple, you have to be close to god and peaceful' – that's not the beginning of the training – the beginning of the training is that you have to surround them with expectations that seem to be appropriate to them. And those expectations, when they see it 'the space is there, the space is big, the house is big, the rehearsal area is huge, the teachers are here and the facilities for the gamelan are here. Then they are comforted, then you have to go little by little to say what 'poor' really means, what 'simple' really means, what 'simplicity' really means. Because you can't just have thirty people from ten districts of Bali, bring them to Denpasar to rehearse with you and everything is not available, maybe you tell them 'it's O.K to be poor isn't it?' – 'no, it's not O.K to be poor!' would be their reaction right away. (You must comfort them) 'this is the place, isn't the space grand, everything is available here. You want to be here? Is that what you are looking for?'. (Int. 18 August 2005)

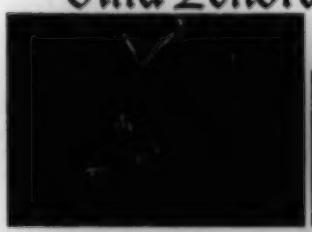
Lendra believes that only after people feel comfortable can a director begin the process of peeling off layers as in Grotowski's philosophy of *via negativa*. He refers to the process of stalking that Carlos Castaneda outlines in his books of Don Juan "you have to be patient, you have to be intelligent, you have to be sweet, you have to be persistent, you have to be cruel" (Int. 18 August 2005). According to Lendra:

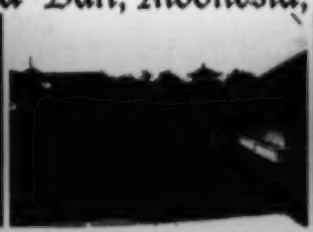
> without patience and intelligence, without being sweet in the way that you're dealing with things, the way you perceive the things, without being persistent – you cannot be cruel in your decisions, because you don't know – you don't have any basis, you don't have any basis to be cruel. When you are cruel to yourself that means you make a decision that is strong enough that entails commitment and finally when you have those four elements before you 'patience, intelligence, sweetness, persistence.' The people that you are thinking about to whom you have to be cruel – they don't feel that you are cruel – they don't feel the cruelty, because of the basis, the four basis are already there. (Int. 17 August 2005)

The way of being that Lendra outlines as guiding the philosophy and pedagogy of Villa Lendra has strong resonance with Grotowski's work. Indeed, the average Balinese would not venture to build a facility of this nature and magnitude in the middle of a growing metropolis like Denpasar where one sees swimming pools and hotels sprouting from the ground up on a daily basis. Lendra's vision is very Grotowski-inspired in its almost defiant expression of tradition amalgamated in a new and unique way. Lendra;

Grand and simple at the same time, it is the idea of creating something invisible in a place that is visible. That is the idea behind it. You don't want to be too overwhelmed. People don't want to be 'wow' that's so great! Everything is so elaborate' – you don't want that. You want the feeling of the sublime, you want the feeling of comfort. And you want the feeling of nature. That is what I am trying to bring to the city. (Int. 11 August 2005)[4]

Villa Lendra Bali, Indonesia, July 2005





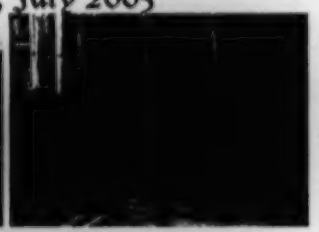


Plate 4.2 *Plate 4.3* *Plate 4.4*

Left: a temporary shrine with offering. Centre and Right: In keeping with the philosophy of nature having more prominence than buildings, structures are built around existing trees (ground level Villa Lendra).

Plate 4.5 *Plate 4.6* *Plate 4.7*

Left: main rehearsal hall Villa Lendra. Centre: an older shrine that will eventually be deconstructed, a ceremony to release the spirits of the shrine will be held upon its dismantle. Right: Temporary staircase leading to the 2nd level.

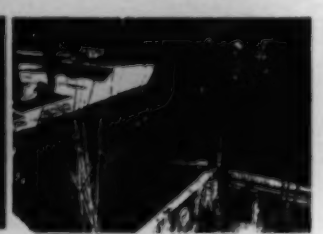


Plate 4.8 *Plate 4.9* *Plate 4.10*

Left: A vegetable garden on the second level of Villa Lendra. Centre: A creative mistake turned symbol of an awakened consciousness: seeing that one is seeing, hearing that one is hearing. Right: Trees growing through 2nd flr.

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[4] Villa Lendra's elaborate appearance may seem at odds with Grotowski's philosophy of poverty; however, the true simplicity of the facility lays beneath the grand surfaces. Lendra intends to provide, not only training in the performing arts, but also room and board and academic education for his young students. This not a venture from which he seeks to profit from personally. This is a self-less gift, a labor of love, not only to the youths, but, to his gods and the art forms that have enriched his life in countless ways.

The Shrine of Villa Lendra

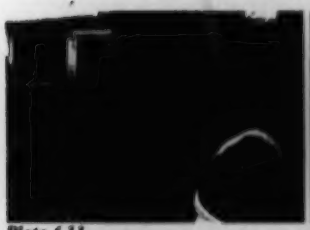

Plate 4.11

Plate 4.12

Plate 4.13

Left: Lendra points out where a house will be created on the second level. Centre: The beauty of nature surrounds Villa Lendra, a sunset photo from the shrine. Right: Fish swim in water surrounding the shrines on the topmost level.

Plate 4.14

Plate 4.15

Plate 4.16

Left and Center: The third, uppermost level of Villa Lendra where the main shrine is located. Right: Balinese Shrines, set according to the principles of *Koosala Koosali*, made of lava stone, seven meters of soil connects them to the earth.

Plate 4.17

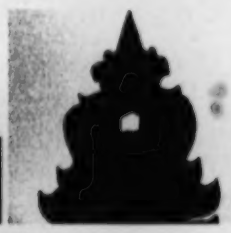

Plate 4.18

Plate 4.19

This particular shrine, located on the uppermost level of Villa Lendra is symbolic of the human being. We are equipped with wings to soar to the heavens. Centre: In the middle of the crown of the human body is an empty space: the doorway through which we can achieve union with the gods is emptiness.

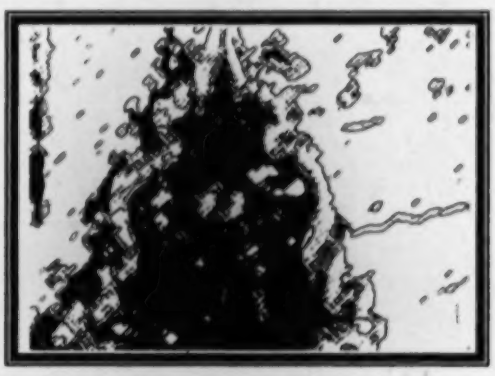

Figure 4.1

Conclusion

Successful playwrights in the West and East have utilized metaphors and symbols to deepen and enrich the meaning of their work. According to Carl Jung these literary devices have their roots in ancient myths and legends. Though these symbols may be culture specific, they often transcend any 'literary' language. In the *Power of Myth*, Joseph Campbell, who has delved deeply into Jung's philosophy, addresses the apparent paradox of the simultaneously culture-specific and universal nature of myths and symbols. Campbell suggests that through generations and generations of continually working in practical ways with these symbols, in the forms of sacred rites and rituals, their intrinsic meanings become embedded deep within an individual and 'collective subconscious'. By performing rituals, cultures tap into this 'subconscious' whereby symbols, myths, and metaphors are no longer confined to an intellectual level of understanding; but, instead, they are able to penetrate deep within the physical body whereby their very essence can be embodied. Brook describes the sacredness of ritual as being dependent upon finding

> the true inner echo. Clearly this cannot be an intellectual or consciously prepared attitude, but in the sound of the voices (is) the unmistakable ring of great tradition. The secret (is) clear. Behind this manifestation (is) a way of life, an existence that ha(s) religion as its root, all-present and all-penetrating. What in religion is so often an abstraction, a dogma or a belief became here the reality of the villagers' faith. The inner echo does not come from faith: faith arises within the echo (Brook, *Open Door* 50).

The intercultural process can yield new forms and practices that are truly unique, however, the true value of these new forms is dependent upon the honesty and openness of the individuals or group of individuals in collaboration. If one connects with the inner echo within traditional forms then one moves closer to an authentic understanding of another culture. It is a quality of openness that enables one to hear the inner echo within

other cultural traditions. However, just because one has a quality of openness and is able to hear the inner echo does not mean that one will treat it responsibly.

Ultimately the quality and the value of intercultural work is dependent upon one's approach. My goal is to learn together with other cultures as we work collectively to give form to something formless. By displacing cultural elements such as masks from their traditional performance context we may risk losing the deep meaningful intimacy and connection to their sources. However, there is a way that we can approach other cultures that is full of respect, a respect that originates, not from an empty adherence to codes, but from a deep recognition and reverence for the implicit truths within such forms and traditions. In order to connect with another culture's traditions we must be bold and remove our masks, only then will we be ready to breathe authentic life into the masks of other cultures. As Tracey states,

> We must now respectfully throw off the secular iron mask and move to a new level of development. The sacred lies in wait for our approach…If the human ego can learn to live in the presence of the sacred without being overwhelmed by it then a genuine spirituality can emerge from the creative interaction of humanity and the sacred (Tracey 6).

Intercultural theatre must be an invitation to listen to this inner echo, and even if for a brief moment to experience seeing and being something new -- seeing and being from the inside out.

Plate Conclusion. 1
Sri Yantra, the most celebrated of all tantric yantras. A mystical construction of the cosmos.
Source: Khanna, Madhu. *Yantra: The Tantric Symbol of Cosmic Unity*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1979.

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